

DESIRE LINES: DÉRIVE IN HETEROTOPIAS

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This study provides an examination and application of heterotopic *dérive*, a concept that combines spatial theories originated by Foucault and psychogeographical methods advocated by the Situationists, as enacted within theatrical performance spaces. The first chapter reviews theories related to space, place, and heterotopias, as well as the psychogeographical methods of the Situationists, particularly the *dérive*. The literature review is augmented with accounts of my experiences of serendipitous heterotopic *dérive* over a period of several years as a cast member in, or a technical director for, theatrical productions in the Department of Communication Studies Black Box Theatre. Based on the review, I postulate that heterotopic *dérive* is a potentially valuable phenomenon that performance studies scholar/artists can utilize consciously in the rehearsal process for mounting theatrical performances. To test this proposition, I worked collaboratively with a theatrical cast to craft a devised performance, *Desire Lines*, with a conscious effort to engender heterotopic *dérive* in the process of creating the performance. This performance served as the basis for the second chapter of the study, which analyzes and discusses the results of that investigation. This project enhances understanding of the significance of the places and spaces in which performers practice their craft, and argues for the potential of recognizing and utilizing the agency of heterotopic spaces such as the Black Box.

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By

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CHAPTER 1

LOST IN SPACE

The standard public address (PA) system in the Department of Communication Studies Black Box Theater at the University of North Texas (henceforth referred to as the Black Box) consists of two speakers set behind the audience, and a pre-amp that sits in whatever corner of the room we use as the “tech space” for any given performance. The system is *finicky*: even if we had the money to afford a ceiling mount, the ceiling is too fragile to support one. If the speakers are placed on the floor behind the risers, any sound coming from them is muffled as it passes through an audience full of bodies; bodies which, considering the intimate space of the Black Box, also nullify any volume and mixing settings we plan during rehearsal. The system is *fragile*; the preamplifier and speakers are meant to latch together, but they are so heavy that the latches broke. Recently, a performance studies professor asked me to identify two cables – one of the cables was the power cord for our PA system, and the other we accidentally brought back to Denton from a performance festival. I had no trouble identifying our cable as its red and green internal cables were exposed; it is falling apart. The system is *noisy*, and not in the way it should be; the internal fan it requires for cooling, while small, is audible from every corner of the small room, which further problematizes our ability to mix sounds at the right volume.

Nevertheless, that PA system is the most effective piece of technology we as a department have when we want to transform the space of the Black Box via soundscapes or music. *Fun!*, a production that ran in the Black Box in March of 2017 (King & Ballard), is illustrative of how technology helps us do performance work. *Fun!* examined misguided societal perceptions of mental health through the metaphor of the “elephant in the room,” and through

the lens of Bakhtin's (1968) theory of the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque utilizes humor and cacophony to subvert hegemonic structures and norms; in true carnivalesque fashion, *Fun!* extensively used lights and sound to underscore the show's themes. Therefore, our PA system saw extensive use throughout the show, which was of course accompanied by the ever-present white noise of the preamplifier's cooling fan. *Fun!* contained scenes that explored topics such as schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, depression, and anorexia in a colorful and noisy carnival, but King and Ballard placed a particular scene approximately four-fifths of the way through the production that stands out, both thematically and mechanically.

The scene consists of two cast members, who also happen to be the co-directors, speaking to one another about how society treats suicide as a crime and a result of cowardice, and not what it truly is: a fatal *symptom* of mental illness. Suicide, King and Ballard argue, is not indicative of the victim's lack of care for the people they love, or something that makes them a bad person; rather society places such labels on those who commit suicide as a way to distance themselves emotionally, or to displace wrongdoing (the fault may lie with those who insisted on telling the victim to "cheer up" as a false fix, or insurance agencies' red tape keeping a patient from medicine they need). King and Ballard placed this scene near-but-not-quite-at-the-end, after a cavalcade of scenes exploring more recognizable symptoms of mental illness because, as we cannot speak about them, the true reasons behind suicide *are* the elephant in the room. The last line of the scene before the carnival reasserts itself is read by a third cast member acting as a therapist: "During the events of 9/11, a few people trapped in the highest floors of the World Trade Center broke the glass on the exterior of the building. Do you think they *wanted* to die, or were they just trying to escape the fire?"

In terms of presentation, the scene had little to no staging, and the only lights were bright white, which was a major departure from the rest of the show's frenetic movement and constantly shifting colors. The scene featured no mediated sound—the scene played out with two bodies center stage, and the other three cast members either frozen or moving minimally. The scene is a gut check—a major aspect of the carnivalesque is cacophonous sound, color, and movement, to the point that any silence or stillness is immediately marked by a powerful and distinctly purposeful intent. Even I, the tech operator for the show who spent most of its running time fiddling with knobs and switches, had nothing to distract me from this particular scene—there were no lights to change, no sounds to cue, nothing to do but watch and listen. In fact, the only option available to me seemed, at first, counter-intuitive, but I did it anyway: I turned the preamplifier *off*.

The scene directly preceding the suicide scene was a cacophony of laughter, whispers, intrusive thoughts, and red/blue/purple lighting that tormented a performer portraying the symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder. The rest of the cast, portraying symptoms of her mental state operating under the symbolic guise of a morning news show team, loudly cackled at her inability to stop imagining a family being burned alive. The scene ended abruptly, the lights went white in preparation for the suicide scene and, notably, *crucially*, the space transformed from one defined by raucous noise to one smothered in a deafening quiet. The preamplifier's fan can be obnoxious, but it tends to fade into the background as a performance continues. Now however, neither the audience, I, nor even the cast as I found out later, could not help but notice its absence. Without the fan, there were no sounds or movement to distract or protect any of us from paying attention. The only sounds other than the actors

speaking were creaks made by dis-comforted bodies shifting in seats, and sniffles from the people who were most affected—noises that did not distract from the scene, and in fact only amplified our connection with it.

The quiet of the room during this portion of the performance has remained in my thoughts in the months since the production. Let me be clear: I am in no way bragging, expounding upon the brilliance of my “incredible decision” to flip a switch. My aim, in fact, is to *defer* credit, because the more I contemplate what happened in that moment, the more confident I am that I was not the only agent responsible for that action. Switching the preamplifier off, this subtle but important change in ambient sound, was a solution to a logistical hurdle that amplified the performance, rather than simply negating the problem. Certainly, one should give credit to King and Ballard, who wanted the rest of the performance filled with sound. Additionally, the more I consider this scene and the process of its creation—and considering that the PA system is a standard piece of equipment in our Black Box, and is therefore only one (however integral) part of the Black Box as a whole—the more I am confident that the agency of the Black Box itself was also in play.

First, if we had a PA system for the Black Box that was quiet in the first place, that extra *oomph* of silence would not have been possible. Certainly, without the PA system’s noisy fan, The Black Box would have been just as silent during the suicide scene. However, the ever/present hum ended up speaking more to the nature of mental illness in its *absence*. Second, the PA system, like the lights, is a standard piece of equipment that is integral and indistinguishable from the Black Box itself. These accouterments, like the cast members, the (co-)directors and assistant director(s), the technical director, and even the faculty mentor or

friend who attends a single rehearsal to offer advice, is engaging in the process of transformation of a place—the Black Box—into the space(s) of a performance. All of these individuals and things—the space included—are co-performers, who work together to amplify the effectiveness of the performance. Third, agency is not a possession or an attribute, it is as Barad described it, an “enactment, ... a matter of making iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity” (as cited in Ewalt, 2016, p. 138). Therefore, the decision to flip the little switch on the back of the preamplifier was the result of a push-and-pull relationship between the agency of the directors, my own agency, *and* the agency of the Black Box; the “‘agency of the assemblage,’ or the entangled movements of many different modalities of matter, human and not, discursive and not, as they come from and make their way elsewhere” (Ewalt, 2016, p. 139).

In working through this moment that has so thoroughly burrowed its way into my analytical mind, I have come to realize that this push-and-pull between the space of the Black Box and the performers within it is responsible for other discursive performance choices that define and amplify their effect on the audience. Originally (and, thank God, temporarily) naming them “magical moments,” I began to recognize them as an important part of what makes the Black Box such a promising space from which (or, perhaps, *with* which) to work. As I started digging to uncover what, exactly, I was looking to study, I had discussions with professors, colleagues, and friends about the most memorable aspects of different performances we had seen or been involved with, and we often discovered that the moments in a performance’s creation process that stood out were not unlike the moment when I decided to flip the preamplifier switch. They were moments of serendipity—moments with conspicuous

ties to the space itself, and moments where the discussion over who deserves the credit is difficult, frequently impossible, to resolve. That these moments are not unique to my experience was a happy revelation, and that revelation has led me to research what those moments are and how they happen.

I begin, then, with a review of literature whose authors have led me to view the Black Box as heterotopic (Foucault, 1984), as a slippery social actor (Terry, 2010), and as a place from which any person who simply walks in can find themselves living and creating a unique version of space (de Certeau, 1985). Second, I narrow my review to the specific moments I am looking for, by examining situations similar to the one described above, which occurred in two other performances with which I was involved: *Big Tex is Burning* (Trudeau & Vaughn, 2013), in which I was a cast member, and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race* (Allison, et al., 2017), for which I served as technical director. Also aiding me in this second task is the performance art group known as the Situationists, whose concept of psychogeography, specifically the *dérive* (or “drift”), point to a multitude of perspectives that act within the agency of the city (Debord, 1956). I should note that although Foucault and Debord disagreed on what constitutes spectacle, through Ewalt (2016) and his analysis of spatial agency, I see a connection between the “other” space of the heterotopia and the ways in which individuals in a *dérive* acknowledge and utilize space within the context of their own motives. Lastly, I provide a rationale for a new performance, *Desire Lines*, I helped create with the purpose of examining the creative process and looking for these serendipitous moments when they happen—this “heterotopic *dérive*” at work.

The “Place” and Many “Spaces” of the Black Box

I consider myself lucky to be able to rehearse and create performances in the same space in which I presented *Desire Lines* to an audience. Many theatre programs, including the Theatre Department at the University of North Texas, have production members rehearse in separate rooms and transfer to the theatre just prior to the public performance. In the communication studies department however, we do not have that luxury. Our Black Box is used for creation at least as much if not more than it is used for presentation. Though traditionally-minded theatre practitioners might see this as indicative of our lack of monetary privilege, which may be true, I see our one-room setup as less of an obstacle than an opportunity. The Black Box, in the process of creating performances, serves as a laboratory. Its matte black finish makes re-painting after “experiments” a trivial process, and its rectangular floorplan leaves ostensibly few obstacles for performers intent on transforming the space; those performers can re-arrange the Black Box’s chairs, risers, and technical equipment with minimal effort.

The Black Box’s laboratory function also extends to its extensive use as a classroom. All of the performance-identified faculty members in the communication studies department utilize the Black Box as a tool to enable learning. Before my time, the space currently occupied by the Black Box was bifurcated; prior to its current incarnation, the space was two adjacent rooms in a nondescript university building with a wall dividing them. The wall was removed, the space was painted black, and the carpeted floor eventually was replaced with wood that could also be painted to match the walls and ceiling. When the communication studies department purchased equipment for the Black Box that was expensive enough to steal, the space was

locked. Though the Black Box no longer resembles the classrooms adjacent to it in the General Academic Building (GAB), the performance studies faculty utilize it as one.

As a primary research space/laboratory/tool for the performance studies-centered scholars at UNT, the Black Box is the location of many performances by students, faculty members, and teams comprising any number of both. However often I see the Black Box space used as a classroom, and have used it in that way myself, I have seen it just as often used as imaginary spaces created via the means of performance. *Fun!* transformed the Black Box into a carnival. Other performances I have experienced and/or have helped create have morphed the room into a stand-up comedy stage, a state fair, a karaoke lounge, a family dinner, a cruise ship, locales from a Harlequin romance novel, a photography studio, and countless others; many half-forgotten or mis-remembered. While all performances in the Black Box technically take place in the same feature-lite room, those performances transform the “place” of the Black Box into many different “spaces,” and considering our lackluster production budgets, these transformations are due less to clever set-dressing than they are to the *doing* of performance itself.

The performer, that do-er of performance utilized here in the broad sense I used earlier, exerts agency over the Black Box in their use(s) of that space. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) and *Practices of Space* (1985), de Certeau takes the terms “place” and “space,” normally used to refer to a general location, and imprints upon them an important distinction: “place” concerns the authoritative structure of a built environment that serves to influence movement and behavior, while “space” is an individual or group’s usage of that “place.” “Space” is practiced “place.”

To help contextualize this idea, let us consider a hypothetical scenario within a traditional classroom setting, a lecture hall containing a multitude of identical chairs all placed to face a central podium. Students file in through the aisles between rows of seats, as a professor prepares the room's computer to display a PowerPoint presentation. Just outside the lecture hall, a group of students wait for the lecture to start—soon they will burst into the room to create a flash mob performance protesting an unpopular new administration policy. The lecture hall as “place” is a room built with a specific purpose: to contain a number of passive students positioned to consume knowledge bestowed upon them by a single teacher; a system which evokes the “Banking model of education” described by Friere (1970/2000). When an individual “uses” the lecture hall, they are practicing “space,” within which, according to de Certeau, lies the potential for that individual to engage in tactical intervention. An obedient student who uses lecture hall in the ways intended and expected of them is certainly practicing “space,” but so are the students who are not listening; those who are playing video game on their phone or checking their various social media accounts; they are disrupting the A to B communication of a traditional lecture in their own quiet way. So, too, are the flash mobbers, who now burst into the room flinging papers, shouting, and climbing across chairs and between rows. The flash mob's disruption is sudden and unmistakable—the professor stops lecturing, a few students get up from their chairs, and the “space” of a learning environment is subverted. In its stead exists a “space” of protest and anarchy. The flash mobbers who jump between rows of seats, rather than walking through the aisles made for the purpose of safely traversing the room, are intervening in space; they call an alternate space into existence via their use of it.

One may assume that after the flash mob concludes, the lecture hall will revert to its previous state; however, to extend this hypothetical example in order to relate it to the Black Box, I will add one final and necessary wrinkle. A student in the classroom attending the original lecture is caught off-guard by the flash mob, and jumps out of their chair when one of the flash mobbers passes. In her haste to move her belongings out of harm's way, she trips and fall over the row of seats in front of her; her head collides with the back of a seat before she hits the ground. All action stops as the cacophonous space of protest dissipates, and a room that had lost its focal point when the flash mobbers disrupted the lecture suddenly finds a new center. Some flash mobbers and students disperse, either fearing repercussions for their actions or taking the opportunity to leave class early. Some mobbers and students, however, stay with the professor as they circle around the student who lies prone on the floor, and assess the extent of her injuries. This lecture hall, once a space of learning and (as Friere would say) oppression, then a space of protest, is now a space of triage and community; all its remaining occupants are united and preoccupied with a common goal.

In this last wrinkle lies a comment about the lecture hall scenario as a whole: each of these spaces exists temporally separate from the other, but to say that each successive space completely uproots and replaces the last would be an oversimplification. The flash mob, a resistance against normative behavior, is only enabled by bodies who are already familiar with and can enact the disciplined behaviors against which the mobbers are resisting (Walker, 2017). Similarly, the flash mobbers can only effectively enact a space of protest inside the lecture hall—a place which, to them, represents and symbolizes the strict policies against which they mean to rebel. The place of triage, the unintended conclusion of the flash mob, is separated

from the space of learning by a degree of separation constituted by the flash mob's space of protest, but is unavoidably linked to both—a causal effect of the protest which itself was responding to perceived oppression. Each space is layered on top of rather than placed beside the last, and are interlinked by the “place” of the lecture hall and the bodies within it. As Friere (1970/2000) stated, every individual is both an oppressor and a victim of oppression throughout their lives; so, too, these seemingly contradictory spaces have a simultaneous effect on, and are affected by, the emotions and behaviors of individuals within them. In the Black Box, performers enact layered spaces upon a single “place” in similar but, importantly, purposeful ways.

The aforementioned *Big Tex is Burning* (Trudeau & Vaughn, 2013) practiced the “place” of the Black Box as the “space” of the Texas State Fair, but not always in its entirety. The performers (cast and directors alike) utilized clever staging techniques to, in effect, use different scenes in the Black Box as a camera—panning and zooming the space of the state fair, framing different elements on top of one another in order to better call attention to its different locales and aspects. The beginning of the performance represented the titular Big Tex with a single six-foot woodframe boot, with wheels underneath to facilitate the cast's pushing it around the stage. The height of the Black Box's ceiling and the show's budget prohibiting anything taller or more grandiose, the cast evoked the splendor of Tex by simply looking up and over the boot into the ceiling, performing/using the Black Box as bigger than its architecture permits. Later in the performance, after lauding the burning down of Big Tex with a rousing rendition of *Oklahoma* atop the boot and a short intermission, the lights dimmed and the cast shone flashlights on their own faces against the darkness to describe the secret transportation and

unveiling of the new Tex. After building suspense, describing a transportation-by-night of the new animatronic Texan mascot, they unveiled the new Tex by shining all their flashlights at once on a small handkerchief sitting atop the toe of the woodframe boot. A quick pull of the handkerchief unveiled a bobblehead representing the new mascot, affectionately referred to by the performers as “Lil’ Tex.” The bobblehead, about a half-foot tall, perhaps evoked a distant perspective of Tex against the oversized boot on which it sat; the distance the public felt from this new figure compared to the fondness they had for the old one. In essence, though, the new Tex was *small*—the boot, which dwarfed the little bobblehead, came to represent the overshadowing of this new Tex by the larger, older, and whiter presence of the original Big Tex.

The new Tex had a darker skin tone than the last, sparking attention and controversy in many circles. Individuals of Hispanic descent, underrepresented in Texan popular culture and the discourse surrounding it, suddenly had a giant statue that was, however superficially, an icon in which they could recognize themselves. Many others argued against an uprooting of tradition and heritage which, intentional or not, constituted a racial argument against the lessening of white dominance. After the unveiling of Lil’ Tex, a cast member of Hispanic descent, who had participated in the performance until that point only as a technical director, appeared on stage and spoke at length, entirely in Spanish, about the meaning of the new Tex. The boot, once used to represent the glowing smile of a friendly Big Tex in a space of celebration, now foregrounded itself against the bobblehead atop its toe in a lingering and dominating presence and space of racial oppression. The performer foregrounded herself against this space of oppression, which created an entirely new space of resistance. Each of these spaces utilized the same elements of the other spaces—the boot in this instance is used

in spaces of celebration, oppression, and resistance—but each space was temporally distanced from *and* simultaneously layered atop the others. The performers of *Big Tex is Burning* could not have created the space of oppression so effectively without first reeling the audience in by implicating them in a space of celebration. Through rehearsal and performance, performers juxtapose these spaces, layering each on top of the other in order to create new meaning.

“I Cannot Find This Place”

The Black Box, itself at times a classroom, does not resemble our hypothetical lecture hall in that neither its chairs nor its podium are bolted to the ground; almost on a whim, a class or audience may be arranged in whatever way best suits a given situation. The Black Box is made to be transformed, to have spaces layered on top of each other in different ways. Through our use of the Black Box, as a classroom and in rehearsal, we juxtapose “in a single real space several” real and imagined spaces (Palladino & Miller, 2015, p. 9), which aligns the Black Box with a category of space that Michel Foucault (1984) calls “heterotopia.” A heterotopia exists in an in-between state—the spaces that performers create in the Black Box through rehearsal are separate from the world around them, but never do they completely disconnect themselves from the “real” world. To exemplify, I return to *Big Tex is Burning*, wherein the cast practiced the “place” of the Black Box as the “space” of the Texas State Fair. In this case, within the heterotopia of the Black Box existed another known heterotopic space: a fairground. The performers in *Big Tex*, having doubly separated their audience from the “real” world, utilized this separation as a tool to enable an exploration of life growing up as Texans. The performance was at once a respite from real life—a colorful and musical space where the audience watched

as the cast ate corn dogs and danced—*and* a comment on it, a reflection on the mythic norm of a “Texan upbringing” and how constant exposure to that norm affected the cast’s developing identities.

Another principle of heterotopias “concerns a system of opening and closing, through which heterotopias can be sheltered or hidden so that they are only accessible under certain distinctive conditions” (Palladino & Miller, 2015, p. 4). The Black Box is locked. The general public does not have access, and only one of the four doors leading inside is an “authorized” entry point for students and audiences. Only a few conditions exist by which the Black Box is accessible: having paid tuition to attend classes at specific times, having scheduled time with the Black Box manager in order to complete assignments for classes or rehearse a larger performance, or having arrived at a specific time for a scheduled performance. The latter condition contains a sort of ritual: one waits outside the Black Box until the door opens, and waits for the (generally very short) period of time between the door opening, and the door locking again just before the start of the performance. Before even that ritual, locating the Black Box can be something of a quest. The Black Box is no way noted on the exterior of the General Academic Building (GAB) in which it is housed. More often than not, individuals trying to locate the Black Box for the first time participate in a stumbling and tedious exercise in which they have to find the GAB, realize that the ground floor is actually the second of five floors, and then walk the hallway of the third floor until they find the barely-marked Black Box. Only if those individuals can complete this journey before the Black Box has opened and then quickly shut its doors again will they be granted access.

The specific and highly limited periods during which the Black Box is accessible are linked with the periods, themselves highly specific and limited, during which a class or performance takes place. This characteristic of the Black Box aligns it with another principle of heterotopia, that of “heterochronies,” or, “slices of time.” (Foucault, 1984, p. 6) These slices of time can operate in two ways, and the Black Box manages both. First, those periods of accessibility and performance constitute what Foucault referred to as “time in its most flowing, transitory aspect” often exemplified by the festival. Performances in the Black Box are unavoidably temporal—often the Black Box is left empty, and only at certain times, more often during a Fall or Spring semester, is the Black Box occupied, “spaced” by performers. Second, and conversely, a heterotopia can be linked to an “indefinite accumulation of time,” along the lines of museums and libraries within which time “never stops building up and topping its own summit” through new exhibits and artifacts (Foucault, 1984, p. 7). The Black Box shares this aspect of time with museums and libraries in that it, too, is always accumulating time. Each performance and performer leaves an indelible mark, physical or emotional, on the Black Box once a performance is over or a performer leaves, and the Black Box often leaves a similar mark on performers who use it. Alumni, students, and faculty who have experienced or helped create performances in the Black Box often speak of past performances, in reverence or in warning, and let those performances influence not just their own lives, but *new* performances in the space. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race* utilized many of the same lighting cues as *Fun!* (of course with King and Ballard’s permission), and as the technical director of both performances, I used multiple lessons I learned while creating sound and lights for *Fun!* to help facilitate and ease my work with *Race*.

Performers in the Black Box use props in performances both as literal objects and symbolic signifiers. Props accumulate over time in the Black Box, and operate under both facets of heterochronies. Performers only sporadically use these props, which otherwise are left in one of the Black Box's prop closets. Props, like the Black Box, are only used by performers during specific temporal periods. However, when performers do use props over the period of successive performances, these objects accumulate further meaning. Successive performers view these props in new ways through their repeated use, while the props themselves also serve as a citation of the previous performance(s) of which they were a part. During the rehearsal process for *Fun!*, King and Ballard trimmed a sheet of red fabric inside the Black Box's prop closet for use as a table cloth. Their irreversible alteration of the red fabric elicited a delighted reaction from the faculty member who served as their show advisor. The cloth was originally used in another Black Box performance that is not remembered fondly by those who experienced it, and the faculty advisor seemed elated that *Fun!* cited this unfortunate performance by disfiguring an artifact connected to it. The disfiguration of the red fabric represents a distancing of the Black Box from a performance that the faculty advisor, I, and many others who experienced it consider a blemish on the Black Box's track record. The disfiguration was also a spark of hope. The new use of the red cloth serves as a reminder that the Black Box can help performers learn from the past; a bad performance is not "wasted work" as long as successive performers remember what *not* to do. Another example of a prop informing performances other than the one for which it was created is the woodframe boot from *Big Tex is Burning*. The boot, built from wood and piping over a weekend during the rehearsal process for that show, has since been cut down to half of its original height (also

losing its toe in the process) for use in successive performances. Most recently, a director used it as the base for a dinner table in *On a Snowy Morning* (Marsden, 2016), itself a performance about remembering performers and performances. Marsden laid a thin sheet of wood atop the newly shaved boot to create a rollable table, and added a table cloth to complete its transformation. Although the boot is no longer immediately recognizable as a boot, those who still remember *Big Tex* know the origins of that table, and to them, the scenes of *Snowy* which depict togetherness around a table are reminiscent of the warm glow of Tex himself. The re/use of the red fabric and the woodframe boot layered the spaces of the props' original performances on top of the spaces of new performances. While temporally separated, these performance spaces are linked by the performers' re/use of materials common to other performances, a citation of the Black Box's history.

In addition, the Black Box, operated and used almost exclusively by performance-identified faculty and students in the communication studies department, is itself both a citation of its own history and the history of the performance studies discipline; these citations can appear at unexpected times. I can exemplify the former history by simply mentioning the many times I have sat in the room, staring at dirt or glitter on the floor and wondering which performance that I missed spawned it; the latter history, however, requires some explanation. During the rehearsal process for *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race*, a collaborative show in which the performers created vignettes exploring issues of race, one of the performers also wrestled with the issue of memorization. A pivotal scene involved the story of the corrupt trial of an African American woman in the 1950s, the court transcripts of which eventually led that performer, whose home town is the setting of the story, to realize that he had family

members in the Ku Klux Klan. That cast member, worried that he would not be able to commit the entire narrative to memory, presented the performers with a dilemma. Other than a few recent, unfortunate incidents that do not represent the quality for which the communication studies department strives, performers in the Black Box tend to memorize the material they perform on stage. However often performance studies scholars *now* balk at a non-memorized performance, the resolution to this dilemma arose through reverting to historical practice. Another cast member suggested simply bringing a music stand onstage to hold his script, and through this solution some contextual pieces associated with the temporal context of the story the performer was telling suddenly fell into place. In the 1950s, oral interpretation (the name of the field that would later become performance studies) performers utilized a style of performance that favored strong familiarity with the text, but did not require—and frequently discouraged—memorization. Oral interpreters, holding manuscripts or utilizing music stands, used limited movement and rich vocal performances to *suggest* the full meaning of the text, rather than embodying the text through performance. Bringing the music stand on stage evoked a historicity of the discipline by performing a story set in the 1950s utilizing a mode of performance commonly used during that historical period. In addition, grounding the scene in two intertwined histories (the history of race relations in America, particularly the American South, and the history of the academic discipline from which the performance hailed) also commented on the present state of both. As “interpreting literature *aloud* means engaging with literature in the here and now,” (Terry, 2015, p. 11) *and* as heterotopia is a place of spaces separated-but-not-separated from the world around them, this scene helped the co-directors of *Race* comment on the world of the present via its sojourn into spaces of history.

To complete this collision of past and present, the co-directors of *Race* followed the 1950s scene with another that explicitly commented on the present day. The 1950s scene ended when the theatrical lights faded to red, and three white performers entered the stage; two held Tiki torches and wore red hats emblazoned with #MAGA, citing both the Charlottesville protests in 2017 and the presidential election of 2016. The third performer held a lit candle and wore a shirt printed with the image of Donald Trump. The third performer lit the Tiki torches as he confessed to the audience that he voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election, in spite of the fact that he recognized the overt racism inherent in the Trump campaign. The performer spoke about and demonstrated the fact that, although he regrets his decision, he needed only to remove his Trump shirt and keep his head down to hide his actions from others. The performer's hiding—his ability to, through his in/action, convince others to believe he had not acted in a problematic manner—relates to the experience of the performer/narrator in the 1950s scene. The 1950s scene performer re-entered the stage to deliver one last personal story to connect the two scenes. During the rehearsal process of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race* he had found the court transcripts for the trial as well as an interactive map posted online by the Southern Poverty Law Center that detailed the location of hate groups in the United States in 2017. When the performer was growing up in the town where the corrupt trial was conducted before he was born, he knew that the Klan existed, but was under the mistaken perception that their activities were confined to a county sixty miles to the east; these two artifacts proved otherwise. Not only did the performer have family members in the Klan, his home town is currently the location of the headquarters for the Georgia Knight Riders of the Ku Klux Klan. The 1950s and 2016/2017 scenes are temporally

separated, in both their placement within the performance and the historical periods in which they are set; however, the scenes are simultaneously layered on top of one another, and each comments on the other through their conjunction.

The performer/directors of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race* called upon the agency and spaces of history of the Black Box when deciding to bring the music stand on stage, which heightened the effectiveness of layering these multiple spaces of past and present atop one another. This use of the Black Box highlights both its “place-ness” and the multiple “spaces” that exist within it. The Black Box, like the frayed power cable for its PA system, is *finicky, fragile*, and, during its highly temporal periods of performance, *noisy*. Its chairs are uncomfortable and its risers are creaky; its standard equipment often devolves into an unloved tangle of cords. However, within the space of the Black Box lies the potential for effective performance, which can facilitate the transformation and transportation of performers (i.e., cast and audience alike) to and through simultaneous layerings of real and imagined spaces.

Heterotopic Dérive, and the Desire Lines that Bring Us There

The Black Box is a bit like a heckler at a stand-up comedy show; a heckler pushes the comedian on stage to make different decisions than they would without such interaction. Similarly, the Black Box uses its agency (Ewalt, 2016) to goad performers to make new decisions, which creates, much like a heckler, an opportunity for emergent performances. Fine and Speer (1977) defined emergence as a performer’s enlarging of their “performance frame to somehow encompass” a “distracting element” in order to “retain (and perhaps increase)” their “power as a performer” (p. 377). The Black Box’s “heckling” is spatial, a distinct difference from the stand-

up heckler's vocal disruption; however, de Certeau himself provides a connection between the grammatical and the spatial. "Language," according to the structuralist de Saussure (1916), is a large bank of linguistic symbols meant to foster communication, and "speech" is a specific utterance of that language. De Certeau asserted that "place" and "space" act similarly: "The act of walking is to the urban system what the act of speaking, the Speech Act, is to language" (de Certeau, 1985, p. 129). The Black Box's hecklings, its distracting elements of "place," are its grain; that is, the Black Box's materiality pushes "back from getting information from point A and point B" (Terry, 2013, 15:10). Those performers may ignore the distracting element, or push past it, but when they instead negotiate their vision of performance with the grain of the space, they may discover that "compromise" with the Black Box leads to a better outcome than they had originally planned.

For example, sometimes the performers who use the Black Box have grand ideas for their performances that present problems to be solved, such as, "How do we create a visual represent of the social structures that perpetuate the historical racism in American culture in ways that allow white people to deny they are racist because they do not engage in any overt acts of racism?" The performers of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race* came into the Black Box with a big idea to illustrate that particular problem: a grid of lasers. Emitters attached to the ceiling and walls of the Black Box would create an *Ocean's Twelve*-esque visual, with three notable differences: the laser beams would form a flat wall from the left to the right of the center stage, the beams of light would never move, and, most importantly, they would be invisible. Unlike in the movies, most laser pointers are not visible to the naked eye when they travel through the air. The invisibility of the light was in keeping with the performers' vision of

how they should function in the show and would work to *Race's* advantage; like the invisible societal structures of racism that are often undetectable to white people, the structural grid would be invisible until specific moments in the production when Black cast members would blow chalk dust out of their hands through the grid, making the invisible structure equally visible to white and Black performers as well as audience members. Although the laser grid undoubtedly would have been a memorable visual, it presented the performers with a problem to be solved.

The laser grid idea was exciting, but problems began to arise as the cast discussed the logistics of setting up this laser grid inside the Black Box. Where and how would they place the emitters? How would they turn the emitters on at the right time? What if the batteries ran out? Perhaps most importantly, how would they be able to *afford* this elaborate visual effect on the meager budget allotted to Black Box productions? As these questions kept mounting, the performers finally had to admit that outfitting the Black Box with lasers was an untenable and overly-complicated proposition. Here the Black Box asserted its grain—its “place-ness.” The amount of physical labor and budgetary fidgeting required to create this laser grid was too much effort with no guaranteed return on the investment. The risk of the effect looking awkward, either because of a complete failure in execution or because of the effect might fail to trigger properly during the run of the production in front of audiences, were granular matters related to the Black Box that the performers had to accept. This apparent failure of imagination, of course, brought into question the feasibility of effectively performing this indispensable scene, which established early in the production the truth that race is an issue that affects *everyone* whether or not they are capable of recognizing this fact. Soon enough,

however, one cast member proposed a solution that worked in conjunction with the stubborn “place-ness” of the Black Box. Instead of an unwieldy and expensive laser grid, why not simply construct a grid using bands of elastic? Stretchy elastic is cheap, easily mountable via hooks placed on the walls and the metal dividers that already exist between the Black Box’s ceiling tiles; and, the grid is visible without requiring the use of messy chalk dust. Setting up this effect on stage would be far less demanding than hoping that a potentially finicky invisible laser grid would correctly activate the moment it would be required to provide a visual representation of the invisible societal structures of racism.

This solution’s utility was, first and foremost, an actual feasible idea the cast could use; however, as the performance came together, the performers began to realize that this compromise with the Black Box’s grain had enhanced this scene of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race* in unexpected ways. First, creating the grid on stage was labor intensive; the performers’ labor in constructing the grid mirrored the labor of countless individuals to construct and ultimately disguise the historical systems of oppression that characterizes American society in the 21st century.

Second, the elastic grid was tangible; its materiality made it visible, touchable, manipulateable, capable of being struggled with, and ultimately capable of being destroyed. Once constructed, the grid, represented not only the societal divide between Blacks and whites, but also the confining/restrictive forces against which the oppressed continue to struggle. The grid literally trapped the Black cast members; it entangled them as they spoke about the racist world with which they had to come to terms as children. And, two Black performers eventually cut the grid into pieces while a third Black performer delivered a visceral, no-holds-barred slam

poem explaining and excoriating white privilege. Importantly, even after the grid had been destroyed, it remained present on the stage, even in its absence. Tatters of elastic strips hung from the ceiling where it had once stretched to the floor or a wall; and, by design, scraps of elastic littered the back edges of the stage, reminding performers and audience members alike that the specter of racism still lingers. Had the grid been created by lasers, turning them off might have suggested that the structures of racism had been completely dismantled, that the struggle was over—a message that the performers explicitly rejected in another scene in the performance.

Finally, notably, the elastic grid was built *during* the performance rather than before. The performers would have had to place the laser grid before each performance, and it would only have been visible to the audience when a performer blew chalk dust through it. The elastic, on the other hand, allowed the audience the opportunity to see the performers building the grid during the performance. The labor of building the grid, in addition to implicating the historicity of its construction mentioned above, demonstrated how *all* individuals are implicated in the construction and re/performance of racist structures that redound to the benefit of some and the detriment of others. The Black Box's agency as a space is in large part deserving of as much credit as the performers of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race* in the re-visioning of the grid.

To explain this “compromise,” this push-and-pull between performer and space, I call upon the help of the performance art movement known as the Situationists. The situationists utilized the concept of psychogeography, which Debord defined as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the

emotions and behavior of individuals” (1944, para. 2). Limiting the map of Debord’s broad “geographical environment” to the heterotopic space of the Black Box, one may say that the psychogeography of the Black Box is a study of how it influences the performers within its confines. This concept helps explain one side of this compromise; the Black Box is a “material actant” (Ewalt, 2016), the psychogeography of which exerts agency over the performers who use it. The performers on the opposite side of the compromise, however, do not operate in the same way. Here Debord is of further help; the performers on the opposite side of this compromise can be said to be operating inside a “dérive,” or drift. In a *dérive*, “one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there” (Debord, 1956, p. 2). Applying this concept to the space of the Black Box uncovers metaphorical parallels with the process of rehearsal. Debord (1956) described *dérive* as a “technique of rapid passages through varied ambiances” which parallels the layered “spacing” of the Black Box as discussed earlier (p. 2). Further, Debord stated that *dérives* involve the same “playful-constructive behavior” that often takes place during rehearsal. Debord conceived of the *dérive* as a practice that can occur within any geographical environment; however, the specific ways in which the processes of *dérive* metaphorically align with the heterotopic space of the Black Box suggest that a further particularization of *dérive* is necessary to examine its operation within heterotopic spaces.

As in a *dérive*, individuals in a heterotopia drop their normal modes of relation to other individuals and their environment. For example, performers in the Black Box may be typically subordinate to their parents, but when those parents show up for a performance, they are at

the whims of their children on stage. Two people may be friends in their everyday lives, but in the Black Box they may adopt the subordinate role of student, the superior role of director, or the power sharing alternate title “performer.” Also, for the purposes of rehearsal, many performers drop their normal work or leisure activities. For example, performers may ask for fewer or different shifts at their jobs, which can affect their financial situation, and they may also cancel their usual plans with friends and/or family members in favor of working the Black Box. In addition, performers dropping “all their ... usual motives for movement and action” seems to resemble the type of behavior that goes into the creation of conspicuous aesthetic performance (Shaffer, 2016); that is, performance separated from the everyday and marked as such.

Performers within the Black Box, when they interact with the space itself, do often seem to “let go,” which is a major element of *dérive*. However, on the converse side, Debord (1956) stated that “the *dérive* includes both this letting-go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities” (p. 2). Here too, it would seem, the process of rehearsal can align itself with *dérive*, and this second trait is where the push-and-pull I discussed earlier is evident. Although the Black Box seems to exert agency over situations, like my flipping off the preamplifier switch during *Fun!* or the switch from a laser grid to an elastic grid in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race*, the performers themselves—me and the cast of performers in *Race*, respectively, in these situations—were equally as responsible. The performers in each instance, operating in the “knowledge and calculation” (Debord, 1956, p. 2) of the possibilities within the

heterotopia of the Black Box, being familiar with or willing to experiment with it in a heterotopic *dérive*, made those moments possible.

Even in *Big Tex Is Burning*, specifically the dark scene illuminated only by flashlights before the unveiling of Lil' Tex that I discussed earlier, heterotopic *dérive* is at play. Although the small and distant portrayal of the little bobblehead juxtaposed quite nicely against the enlarged woodframe boot illuminated only by flashlights, Trudeau and Vaughn's original plan for this scene did not involve the absence of theatrical lighting. Originally, the directors planned to utilize the Black Box's lighting grid as with every other scene. The directors did not/could not anticipate the intensified effect on the audience (and themselves) that would be caused by the encompassing darkness. The decision to shut off the theatrical lights in the first place was, above all, practical; The Black Box was too hot. Typically, to conserve energy, UNT Facilities directs that the air-conditioning be shut down at night for the entire GAB in which the Black Box is housed. Since performances in the Black Box usually begin at seven o'clock at night, individuals in the communication studies department regularly request that UNT Facilities keep the air conditioning on in the Black Box on show nights. However, Facilities often forgets to do so, or fails to respond to urgent last-minute requests to restore the air-conditioning. For *this* reason, performances in the Black Box, most of which use our outdated, hot theatrical lighting grid, have cast members and audiences alike awash in sweat. Because *Big Tex is Burning* was long enough to require an intermission, the directors placed the intermission immediately prior the Lil' Tex scene, and then, after the performance resumed, kept the theatrical lights off until he was revealed. This choice, according to Vaughn, was the reason that the initial scene of the second act was performed in darkness. To cope with the heckling heat, the directors

compromised with the Black Box, which affected their performance and added another, unique layer of affect to the show.

Another element of the *dérive* pertinent to the performance creation process is that “all indications are that the most fruitful numerical arrangement” in the practice of *dérive* “consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness” (Debord, 1956, p. 3). This characteristic seems to align with the performance creation process in that the number of performers as a whole, such as the cast of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race*, exceed the number of performers directly responsible for any given heterotopic *dérive*. Consider, for example, the elastic grid in *Race* that replaced the hypothetical unwieldy laser grid. The entire cast was not originally in play regarding this decision. The elastic grid was originally discussed as a possibility by two of the performer/directors of *Race*, who conceived this new possibility before presenting it to the rest of the performer/directors. Furthermore, the addition of the music stand in *Race* which solved the problem of memorization was originally conceived and discussed by another pair of performer/directors before presenting the possibility to the individual experiencing anxiety over his difficulty with memorizing and subsequently presenting the potential solution to the remaining performer/directors. Although one person *can* practice heterotopic *dérive*, and while all the performers in a production are certainly at play in the execution of a heterotopic *dérive*, all of the examples I have as discovered of production moments arising from these compromises between performer and heterotopia seem to support Debord’s predictions about group size. Further, these examples illustrate how a multitude of perspectives in a performance are often necessary for heterotopic *dérive* to function.

According to Debord (1956) weather, perhaps storms or other forms of prolonged precipitation, “are rather favorable for dérives” (p. 4). Although Debord does not provide further example or explanation than this fragment, one can extrapolate that in this proclamation he evokes the idea that, in a city, a sudden storm creates just as sudden a need for individuals to avoid them. The psychogeography of a city in the case of a flash storm becomes one of the focal points that cause individuals to seek the most convenient haven from a downpour of water. Thus, one may see individuals who may not otherwise know one another or may not otherwise have acknowledged each other or their presence together in the space where they now stand, huddled near each other under awnings in alleyways or just inside storefronts. Others may not leave their homes in the first place after discovering that their plans have been dashed by this sudden meteorological and psychogeographical shift. In this characteristic, too, I see parallels to the rehearsal process in the Black Box. The storm could represent any of the many crises that can occur during rehearsal, such as the last-minute decisions one must make under a looming deadline. In such cases, performers utilize the solution nearest to hand to address the grain-y “place-ness” the Black Box chooses to afford them. Consider again the crisis of memorization in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race*. The sudden, shared concern that a performer might be unable to commit to memory a lengthy narrative, created just as sudden a need for other performers/directors to look to the space for answers. In this case, they looked to the *history* of that space. Utilizing Debord’s metaphor, the storm can be conceived as a facilitator of dérive; in this instance, the music stand became an awning under which the performer could find respite. The Black Box provided a haven against the “storm” of tricky memorization.

While chance certainly is another factor that affects *dérive*, Debord (1956) describes it as “a less important factor ... than one might think” (p. 2). However, the succumbing to and calculation and subversion of chance provides performers with an awareness of the psychogeographical effects of the Black Box’s “place-ness” necessary for the compromises that can occur when those performers layer different “spaces” atop one another. One might assume that psychogeographical effects of spaces like the Black Box on performer behavior may be simply an element of chance, or the whim of the performer exhibiting the behavior, but chance, says Debord (1956), is “naturally conservative” (p. 3). Individuals may enter the Black Box for the first time and, presented with an unfamiliar room, revert to habit rather than risking new behaviors, utilizing actions that have served them well in other spaces. In the case of rehearsal in the Black Box, this reversion to one’s comfort zone may extend to methods a performer may use to stage a performance. Liz King, one of the co-directors of *Fun!*, related to me that when she first took classes in the Black Box she constantly needed to readjust her expectations of the space, which she originally found suffocating: “When trying to stage a performance for class, my theatre background would have me thinking, ‘So to start, I’ll have two people come in from opposite directions off-stage,’ and then immediately realize, ‘Wait, no, the Black Box isn’t like a theatre; there aren’t exits there.’” However, as Debord (1956) stated, to progress one must break “through fields where chance holds sway by creating new conditions more favorable to our purposes” (p. 3). King explained that, over time, as she became more familiar with the Black Box, staging became less an exercise in frustration. Instead of constantly butting her head against the way she perceived a stage “should” work, she was eventually able to experience new modes of thought and conceive of new staging possibilities she never would have been

able to experiment with if she had remained in a typical theatre. She gave herself over to heterotopic *dérive*, to chance and uncertainty, and through that chance opened new modes of thought for exploring performance.

King's experimentation in the Black Box is one aspect of giving oneself over to chance in an attempt to dissipate chance; but, even before working in that room, she had already experienced a change of plans. Coming to the University of North Texas to pursue rhetoric, another division of communication studies, King's first department meeting was with Dr. Holley Vaughn, an undergraduate advisor for communication studies and one of the co-directors of both *Big Tex is Burning* and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race*. During their conversation, Vaughn informed King of the existence of the Black Box. Although King had come from a traditional theatre background, she had worked within Black Box spaces before and found them preferable; and, seeing the opportunity to work within a similar space (albeit bereft of structural elements like traditional stage exits, fly space, or curtains), King quickly decided to focus her coursework in performance studies rather than rhetoric. Hidden in this last account is a message similar to something I have heard in most conversations I have had as I contemplated this project. These conversations were with friends, co-workers, and professors who have worked within the performance studies field, and most of them related that they, in some way or another, got to where they were by chance; these individuals found their way to performance studies by taking unplanned steps outside of their comfort zone. While many entered university with the intention of pursuing degrees in other majors, at some point they followed an unexpected path to get to performance studies. Each of these stories is also my story. I came to the University of North Texas with the express intent of joining the Department

of Radio, Television, and Film, now known as Media Arts. During the last minutes of the university-wide orientation, before charging off to a department-specific orientation where I would begin putting together a degree plan, I started thinking about how much I loved my speech classes in high school and community college and, at that very last second, I made the decision to pursue communication studies. Following my new degree plan, I eventually arrived in the Black Box. I originally wondered if I had made the right choice, and often wondered what life would be like if I had joined a theater department; however, upon the occasion of my first performance in that black room, I knew I had made the right choice.

In his examination of/from the rock formation in Greece known both as the Aeropagos and Mars Hill, Terry (2010) forged a connection between de Certeau and the concept of heterotopia. He argued that the space of the rock is a “slippery social actor,” the geography of which influences the behaviors and emotions of the individuals who climb it. The Black Box, likewise, is a slippery social actor that influences the behaviors and emotions of the individuals who use it to create performances. Terry explained this concept via what is known in architectural circles as a “desire line.” To exemplify a desire line, I most often use the image of a footpath worn into the dirt between sidewalks; the sidewalk represents an officially sanctioned path, and the desire line is an unsanctioned, creative path. The sidewalk is the “place,” and the dirt path is the “space”; the desire line is a more efficient or imaginative path created by others who have left a mark for us to follow. Considering the Black Box’s status as a heterotopia, the fact that no performance studies scholars or audience members to whom I have spoken originally planned to be there, and considering the way that performers in the Black Box utilize *dérive*, I cannot help but make the following connections between the spatial and the lived: I

created my own path to the Black Box, King followed Vaughn's, and others have stumbled their way into the Black Box. No matter how they arrived there, and whatever role they have in creating or experiencing performance, they have either created or followed desire lines. Furthermore, performers create and utilize further desire lines within the Black Box themselves through their utilization of heterotopic *dérive*; they shuck traditional habits of behavior and thought in conjunction with the agency of the Black Box.

The metaphor of the Black Box as a laboratory seems especially apt when examining heterotopic *dérive*. A person entering the Black Box must hypothesize the best way to move or behave while inside, and simultaneously succumb to the chance that their hypothesis will prove incorrect. The individual, in this heterotopia, takes a step (be it physical or mental) that they may never have taken otherwise. In that step, the individual practices the "space" of the Black Box; they exert agency over its "place-ness" as, in turn, the "place's" psychogeographical effects work to influence their actions. Through this chance/encounter, the individual creates conditions through which they can thrive *with* the Black Box rather than *despite* it—the experience of a heterotopic *dérive*.

Rationale

Nearly every example I have described thus far—the flipping the preamplifier switch in *Fun!*, turning off the lights in *Big Tex is Burning*, and the elastic grid and music stand in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race*—were all caused by heterotopic *dérive*, wherein the performers and the Black Box arrived at compromises that enhanced, rather than diminished, each of those performances. Even the utilization of the music stand in *Race*, that citation of the

history of communication studies and oral interpretation, was an effect of heterotopic *dérive* at work—the historicity of the Black Box informed an alternate course of action that not only solved a logistical problem, but served to more effectively transport the audience into the past while providing a simultaneous commentary on the present. Until I sought to uncover the reasons behind these serendipitous moments, performance studies have left them unremarked, unspoken, and unpraised. Over the last year I have been searching for a way to examine and to pay tribute to the incredible creative tools the Black Box has afforded me and other performance studies scholar-artists. That search has led me to uncover the heterotopic *dérive*, which affords me an excellent place from which to start.

To examine the process of heterotopic *dérive* in further detail, I propose the creation of a group performance entitled *Desire Lines* in the Black Box. Participating in the creation process will provide me with the opportunity to study this phenomenon in greater detail than is possible when working only from after-the-fact anecdotes. Although I participated in the writing, directing, staging, and adapting necessary within a rehearsal process, I also participated in my own extensive journaling exercises that provided further points of analysis when looking for heterotopic *dérives*. In addition, I spoke often with the cast about their experiences throughout the rehearsal process, as they may experience heterotopic *dérives* in a similar manner to those disclosed in the anecdotes above. Uncovering the conditions under which heterotopic *dérives* operate will serve to enhance the creation of successive performances; if I can uncover further processes and techniques favorable to generating heterotopic *dérives*, performance studies scholars could use these processes to spark the creation of further “serendipitous moments” as part of their production processes. Multiple aspects of my

research into heterotopic dérives have lead me to the conclusion that I need to participate in the creation of an original performance, and to utilize certain methods for creating that performance.

First, the performance should be written collaboratively. My research and my observations lead me to believe that collaboration—giving performers agency over the creation of the production—will more likely facilitate heterotopic dérives. As Debord (1956) theorized, dérives are best practiced by small groups of two to three individuals and, as in the examples mentioned above, each heterotopic dérive was originally practiced by such a small group. Further, collaboratively writing and devising will expose the performers more directly to the grain of the Black Box, affording them the opportunity to experience its agency. Second, technically a Black Box performance process can explore *any* topic and still result in heterotopic dérives. The examples I have explored above provide a sampling rather than a comprehensive list of performances that heterotopic dérives have helped enhance. However, I see this research as an opportunity to create a performance examining the effect that the Black Box as a material space has on our lives, as well as the reciprocal effect we have on the space—with one major limitation, which I will discuss below.

The major limitation I will place upon myself and this production is to refrain from prodding my performers to look for heterotopic dérive. A dérive involves individuals wandering somewhat aimlessly through a space as they let the space guide them; in a heterotopic dérive that wandering takes place during the production of a performance, and is a matter of finding ways from one space to (an)other space(s) through the process of rehearsal. If I force a cast to look for heterotopic dérive, they will find whatever I ask them to look for, which would end up

subverting the process of discovering those serendipitous moments for which I am searching—a grain in and of itself. However, part of the collaborative writing process for the production will involve open-ended writing prompts that will allow the cast to create and maintain a mindset more conducive to thinking about the connections between the lived and the spatial. These writing prompts will help the performers think about space in the specific ways I discuss below, help me learn more about heterotopic dérives, and avoid the grain that inspired this limitation.

Third, the concept of desire lines is a compelling subject to study via performance. As previously described, desire lines are both an architectural representation for the way individuals can subvert “place,” and a metaphor for the method that many individuals have used to arrive in the Black Box. Therefore, *Desire Lines* will examine the spatial *and* social navigation betwixt and between the sanctioned authority of place and the imagined/created possibility of space. This inbetween-ness manifests the reframing power of social performances which “reclaim, short-circuit, and resignify the citational force of the signed imperatives” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 43). Space is “lived, perceived, and conceived” (Hamera, 2006, p. 78) by individuals and groups, and an examination of tactical intervention against the authority of place may well be as political as it is personal and social. For example, in *The Agency of the Spatial*, Ewalt (2016) already brings the subject of materiality to feminist world-making that “views world-making as a process that occurs through the arrangement of material actants” (p. 137). Although I do not approach this performance with a particular political angle in mind, I have no doubt that the subject matter that emerges in a performance about spatiality has the potential to propel the performers in political directions.

Fourth, and finally, a factor in my research that inspires the subject matter of *Desire Lines* is a specific aspect of how heterotopias operate; namely, the other-space of a heterotopia is separate but inherently linked to the world outside it (Foucault, 1984). I consider the Black Box a promising space from/with which to work. Much of the impetus for my research that eventually uncovered the heterotopic *dérive* came from my desire to pay tribute to this space that has meant so much to me and to others. Because the production will explore how space affects the lives of the people who use it, and because the performance will take place within the Black Box, *Desire Lines* should call attention to the function of the Black Box itself as part of the performance. Furthermore, the desire lines that lead performers to the Black Box metaphorically represent both their journey to its many spaces, and the ways they operate once inside. One cannot live solely within the confines of a heterotopia, because a heterotopia both informs and is informed by the world outside it. Therefore, *Desire Lines* will call attention to the Black Box as a space, the space's effect on the performers who use it, while necessarily also exploring the outside spaces and lives which inform and are informed by the actions which take place therein.

In conclusion, I aim to facilitate the creation of *Desire Lines*, a collaboratively written performance which uses the desire line as both an architectural concept and a metaphor for world-making. I will examine the performers' as well as my own participation in the rehearsal process while keeping in mind the following questions. What rehearsal techniques and practices are most conducive to the practice of heterotopic *dérives*? Can performance studies scholar-artists purposefully and consciously engender those factors during the rehearsal process to enhance the effectiveness of a performance?

CHAPTER 2

A SPACE ODYSSEY

Desire Lines was performed in the Department of Communication Studies' Black Box Theatre on four successive evening from Wednesday, February 14, 2018, through Saturday, February 17, 2018, and concluded with a matinee performance on Sunday, February 18, 2018. The performance was based on a devised script that had eleven scenes across two acts, divided by an intermission (Appendix A). I held auditions for the performance in mid-December, 2017, and decided on a cast of ten. I had recruited several performers prior to auditions, and I was familiar with previous work of the auditioning individuals I invited into the cast. The show's run followed an eight-week rehearsal process divided into two halves. The first half consisted of weekly meetings, where cast members had responded to writing prompts (Appendix B) intended to inspire them to think about space more consciously than they had before; for example, the first prompted the cast to tell "a story about a black box" in whatever form they wished. Following a four week writing process, we entered the Black Box for the second half of the rehearsal process and began holding three-hour rehearsals, three days a week. During the second half of rehearsals, we worked in small groups brainstorming and constructing scenes based on our writing prompt responses and the discussions we had during our weekly meetings, a process I hoped would inspire instances of heterotopic *dérive* as I will explain below. As we completed individual scenes, we began blocking them independently, again in small groups, before deciding the order in which we placed them in the final performance. Of our cast of ten, seven played consistent on-stage roles throughout the performance. Two took on assistant directorship roles, and also performed one scene in *Desire Lines* immediately

following an intermission. I utilized my talents as technical operator, and controlled the audio/visual effects throughout the performance. During the performance, I was positioned in an improvised “tech booth” between the audience and the stage. Often, tech operators perform their duties from within a media closet behind the audience, but I decided on this alternate positioning in order to foreshadow the second act of the performance in which we moved the audience seating to the opposite side of the Black Box.

De/Spacing the Black Box

What we effectively created with *Desire Lines* was a “rapid passage through varied ambiances” (Debord, 1956, p. 2) in which we laid spaces atop, rather than beside, one another within the *place* of the Black Box to mirror and practicalize our cast’s discussions on material space and the effects it has on our lives. In writing and rehearsing *Desire Lines*, we opted not to include a scene where we described exactly what a desire line is, or explicitly elaborate our “point” to the audience. We, the cast and directors, felt that the multiple transformations of space we produced during the production would have a lessened effect on an audience if we prodded that audience to “look at how we transformed space!” Moreover, my research into the Situationists, in particular Debord’s writing on the *dérive* (1956), led me to the understanding that the Situationists were not particularly interested in any specific effect that psychogeography has on individuals (i.e., they were disinterested in persuading an audience towards supporting a single political perspective or course of action); rather, they were invested in exploring *any and all* psychogeographical effects. Therefore, we presented the fruits of all the conversations and ideas we had over the course of our two month production cycle in their

messy complexity. Pausing the whiplash of spaces we created to tell the audience to, for example, “listen to your spaces, and treat your relationships with them with as much care and understanding as you do with people” could take focus away from the *acts* we performed, of caring for the spaces that matter (to us). Further, one of the many conversations I had with colleagues in preparation for *Desire Lines* ended in the sentiment that “space communicates.” Homes and gyms, spaces public and private, all nonverbally influence the emotions, actions, and thoughts of individuals within them. We sought to, through our performance, allow the Black Box to serve as a communicative agent in *Desire Lines*, and make visible its role in the construction of the performance, a role that is often silenced by the agency of the humans creating that performance. In a sense, if we as the human performers explicated our points through verbal language, we feared it would drown out the quieter, nonverbal language of the place and spaces we wished to highlight.

To allow the Black Box to retain agency as a communicative agent throughout *Desire Lines*, we constructed scenes in the performance to foreground and background different aspects of space and place so that an audience might begin to feel and/or contemplate their effects. Such foregrounding/backgrounding begins even before a performance officially “starts.” Whenever an audience member enters the Black Box for the first time, they are confronted first with its “place,” the physical make-up of the room designed to facilitate/influence the individuals within it. In the case of *Desire Lines*, the audience entered the Black Box to see the room already lit by theatrical lighting, rows of seating to their right, and most of the cast splayed awkwardly around the stage to their left. A given audience member, unfamiliar with the Black Box place entirely or at least unfamiliar with the particular production

that they have come to see, take the cues of their fellow audience members and file into the seats on risers located to their right and wait for the performance to start. Even an audience member who has experienced multiple performances in the Black Box will re/set their expectations and allow themselves to revert to previous habits, such as allowing the cast and crew to direct them to their seats, when seeing a performance for the first time. For the audience as they enter the Black Box, the “place” of the theater is far in the foreground, and the only “space” is one of obedience and, perhaps, anticipation.

The introductory scene in *Desire Lines* primed the audience to understand that the singular place they now inhabited could contain within it many layered spaces. Once the audience was seated, a cast member playing a character named Jethro closed the door to the Black Box and greeted the audience with a warm smile, shooed the scattered scattered cast members as if they were squatters on “his” stage, and delivered a monologue that established a fictional history of the building in which the audience now sits. Jethro began with wholesome descriptions of orange groves that occupied the property before the construction of the town’s first police station, before moving on to the building’s later (and seedier) uses as a napalm factory, squatters’ commune, and finally, the pornographic movie theatre Jethro now operates. Jethro did not reveal the building’s current (within the fiction) status as a pornographic movie theater until the very end of the monologue, when he wheeled a television center stage that displayed the opening frame of “Ass Blasters 7,” the title of the film he thinks the audience has come there to see. Within the fiction of Jethro’s monologue, the audience played the role of a group of adult movie patrons, but the audience was not privy to our casting them in that role until near the end of the monologue. All the audience knew was the place of the Black Box, and

that they were at the mercy of a man on stage to make sense of their situation, to help them create space where before there had only been place. The quick succession of spaces Jethro evoked throughout his scene dis/oriented the audience, disrupting/backgrounding the “place” the audience experienced when they entered, and creating/foregrounding instead a shared space and history. Jethro’s monologue never explicitly directed the audience to think about space and place as abstract concepts; however, within the fiction, Jethro saw no need to remind the audience who they were, why they were where they are, and how they should act while there. Constructing the monologue in this way was a deliberate decision to further dis/orient the audience by nudging them to ask those questions of themselves: “Who does this person think I am? What space is this supposed to be? Where am I? What is expected of me?” Those questions, and the hypotheses one might consider while asking them, are common inquiries when entering unfamiliar places, questions that can eventually lead to creating spaces and understanding the spaces that others create.

Jethro was on stage for only a few minutes, but in those minutes he created a whiplash-inducing shifting of spaces throughout his twisting, although fictional, historical account. After he left the stage, the space-shifting continued, but our pace slowed. Jethro’s scene was, in effect, a primer for the rest of the first act of the *Desire Lines*, in which we continued to foreground different spaces such as home, the gym as a temple (during which we also explored the concept of the body as a temple), a subway, and a street corner. The cast shifted the Black Box through each successive space, layering each atop the last in rapid succession, each layer further backgrounding the “place” of the Black Box. The fictional history that Jethro pronounced to his audience was not the focus of any scene that followed his, but his words set

a precedent for the rest of the performance, the precedent that every place has a history of spaces within it, and that every space is experienced differently by different individuals. The scenes that took place during the first act of the show contained the fruits of discussions between the cast. These discussions led to themes such as the expectations placed upon individuals by oppressive places/spaces (perhaps most exemplified by the push-yourself-further-than-is-healthy attitude of individuals during a scene set within a gym), and the rumination, if not nostalgia, that occurs when reflecting on one's childhood home. Each scene, while temporally separated from the other scenes, spoke with them. For example, the aforementioned "gym" and "home" scenes both grappled with themes of individuals becoming disillusioned with spaces they once idolized, while also operationalizing the use of a "desire line" as a metaphor for individuals finding their own way through space. The first act's scenes were also aligned in that they all took place within fictional spaces created by theatrical techniques such as proscenium staging and light/sound effects (we created a scene on a subway with flickering lights, ambient noise, and the cast members swaying in sync, all conjoining to create the illusion of movement). Until its last scene, the first act completely foregrounded "space" and let the "place" of the Black Box slip to the background.

As the last scene of the first act began, the procession of fictional spaces the cast has created came to an immediate halt, which backgrounded "space" in preparation for bringing the "place" of the Black Box back to the foreground instead. The penultimate scene of the first act was intended in part to foreshadow this shift in the performance. The scene took the form of a fictional account of a man (also fictional) named Ned who "played" the monolith in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Ned, the narrator described, had an extraordinary presence about him,

which inspired Stanley Kubrick to hire him to simply stand inside the black rectangular prop during filming. Ned's magnetism burst forth from within the monolith, lending the monolith scenes in *2001* their eerie tone, but Ned's experience within the black box demonstrated limitless potentiality and discovery, which mirrors an aspect of the Black Box I wished to highlight through most of the first act. At the end of the monolith scene, Ned was buried in the monolith prop after his untimely and unexpected death, and the cast gathered around him in reverence as music from the film swelled filling the theatre. Just before the last triumphant note, the audio was cut (and just as in *Fun!*, I switched off the Black Box's pre-amplifier to heighten this effect), and the lights suddenly projected a full white wash (a distinct contrast from the colorful washes we liberally used throughout the first act). Immediately upon this shift, the cast began setting up for another scene before their hurried bustling devolved into an argument involving the fact that no one ever got around to writing the "daytime news" scene they were trying to set. The argument continued until one member of the cast realized that, in their failure to complete a scene that would continue their shifts among spaces, they have found themselves stuck in a transition between scenes.

In actuality, we never wrote a "daytime news" scene, and the cast found themselves stuck in a 'transition' every night during the run of *Desire Lines*. This 'transition' is technically yet another fictional space; however, the scene no longer featured an *entirely* fictional space created by theatrical effects and performance, and in this moment the "place" of the Black Box that the audience experienced as they entered suddenly reasserted itself. After realizing that they were in a transition, the cast decided that, rather than rushing to continue the show, they should take the opportunity to slow down and experience the transition, as transitions are a

consistent phenomenon in theatrical performance, but are always short and are imbued with less importance than the scenes themselves. To enhance their experience of the transition, he cast set up some lamps and string lights, faded out the theatrical lighting so the Black Box was mostly dark, and sat around discussing how they thought the show was going so far as one cast member absentmindedly picked out a tune on his guitar. The cast ruminating on this space of transition highlighted the Black Box itself for the first time in the performance—rather than a quick series of spectacle and scripted content, now the focus was on the cast, the audience, and the mostly featureless place in which they sat. The Black Box, a black rectangle where casts comes to imagine and conjure spaces for audiences, is shown here as powerful in its simplicity. To continue this exploration, the cast then realized the Black Box was not actually completely silent, and prompted each other and the audience to sit quietly and pay attention to a series of buzzes coming from the (now dark) theatrical lighting. Individuals who had experienced previous performances in the Black Box may have recognized the buzz as the noise the lights made as the tech operator shifted them between presets—as any of the lights are activated, it makes a quick buzzing noise for only a second or two, and then becomes silent again as it reaches full brightness. In the transition, however, where the cast had chosen to remain, the buzz remained. What once was an unnoticed feature of the “place” was now front and center; the cast decided that the buzzing was, in actuality the Black Box “singing.” This singing prompted the cast to recount the history of the Black Box—it was first a set of two classrooms separated by a wall, then the wall was removed and the new larger room was painted black, had its carpet removed, risers and lights installed, and then it was locked. The cast’s oral history paralleled Jethro’s fictional history from the beginning of the show, pointing to where the wall

used to be, and how people *used* to be able to enter the Black Box at any time before it contained enough property of value to merit being locked. Where Jethro had dis/oriented the audience in preparation for the performance with a fictional history of spaces, the cast in the transition scene dis/oriented the audience towards seeing the Black Box *itself* as historical, a place that has helped and would continue to help cultivate many performance and classroom spaces.

By the end of the transition scene, we had brought the audience full circle—from confronting them with the “place” of the Black Box, to demonstrating the power and flexibility of “space” as facilitated by both the Black Box and the cast, to bringing “place” back into focus by demonstrating how space and place work together in this heterotopia. At this point, we asked the audience to leave the Black Box for a ten minute intermission, and opened the door for them to do so. As soon as the last audience member had left and we had shut the door, we set to work making some major alterations to the Black Box in preparation for the second act. First, and most importantly, we moved all of the audience chairs to the side of the Black Box that had served as the stage in the first act, placing them haphazardly rather than arranging them carefully. We then draped a short muslin cloth across the length of the ceiling above the risers that had once been the audience area to mask the lights. The cloth was designed to diffuse the lights, which would now shine when activated into the eyes of the audience. Because we did not have time within our short intermission to move the lights to the other side of the room to illuminate the action on the side that would now become the stage, we activated a dim fluorescent light on the ceiling facing the risers that would serve as the main light for illuminating the cast in the second act of the production. Thus, the theatrical lights became

more of an on-stage lighting effect than our primary means of illuminating the performance. Once we had re/set the Black Box, the cast hid in the prop closet (which is behind where the audience originally had been seated, and was now would be in full view of the audience), and I opened the door to usher the audience back into the performance. Upon reentering the Black Box the audience was, again, confronted with “place.” The chairs were no longer where the audience expected them to be, and now, after already having their expectations and spatial orientations challenged in the first act, they were forced to re/set their expectations once again as they awkwardly found their new seats. Because an intermission in the middle of a theatrical performance is normally a byproduct of a show’s length, meant to let the audience stretch their legs rather than risk losing their attention, the audience probably expected that we would begin the performance as before, and continue through a procession of fictional spaces facilitated by the cast. However, our foregrounding of the Black Box’s “place” was intentional, and the first scene of the second act used the history the cast had recounted during the transition scene to complicate the audience’s relationship to *Desire Lines* and to the Black Box itself.

As the audience re-entered the Black Box after the intermission, the fluorescent lights set into the ceiling tiles were on. Normally, the fluorescent lights in the ceiling are utilized only when the Black Box is used as a classroom space; during major performances theatrical lighting replaces the harsh classroom lighting. The audience found new seats on what once had been the stage and, rather than the anticipated deactivation of the fluorescent lights to signal the resumption of the performance, a loud rumble echoed down the hallway outside the Black Box. Two new cast members, assistant directors who had not been on stage during the first act, hurriedly and awkwardly wheeled a large dry-erase board (the one instructors use in the Black

Box when it serves as a classroom) through the front door of the Black Box. As they did so, they revealed their situation—they were “Aviation Logistics” majors who had to complete a performance studies course as a part of their degree plans, and the only time they could schedule the Black Box to rehearse their performance for class was during the *Desire Lines*’ intermission. They only had five minutes left, and they had to produce a performance from scratch. They proceeded at breakneck speed through a comedic series of terrible performance ideas which were familiar to anyone who had taught or taken classes in the Black Box—“edgy,” “weird” ideas meant to fool their professors into thinking that they were “artsy.” The two cast members were creating, of course, a fictional space of rehearsal within *Desire Lines*, but this scene operationalized the history of the Black Box and the classroom/rehearsal spaces within it that normally never occur during a season production. Rather than beginning the second act of the show as the first had, with a series of fictional spaces without direct links to the Black Box’s “place,” the “place” of the Black Box was now at odds with the “real” spaces we create within it. In the second act, rather than foregrounding “place” or “space” one at a time, we played the tension between the two concepts so that they existed in dynamic relationship with one another. The audience, now seeing the relationship between “place” and “space,” was presented with the reality of the Black Box—a heterotopia with a history wherein the real and the fictional operate simultaneously.

As the scene wound down, the rest of the cast emerged from the prop closet, which startled the two Aviation Logistics students, who scrambled out of the room. The remaining/original cast then cleaned up the papers and energy drinks the two had left lying around (a common task that takes place after classes taught in the Black Box classes are

dismissed), rolled the dry-erase board out of the way, and finally flipped the light switch that turned off the overhead fluorescent lights. As the lights went out, one single fluorescent light remained that illuminated the risers, and the sound of crickets faded in from the Black Box's PA system: a fully fictional space had been re-established; the "real show" had finally begun again.

This new scene and the two that follow were, again, fictional spaces created within the Black Box, which ostensibly set *Desire Lines* back on the path it had followed during the first act; however, in reality, we had defamiliarized the performance itself. The audience could no longer see the Black Box simply as a "place," nor could they fully engage with the fictional "spaces" created within it. Despite the show returning to fictional spaces, the audience remained constantly aware of both "space" and "place" operating simultaneously. Just as in Jethro's scene, when the audience asked themselves who and where they were, the audience in the second act had to ask themselves those questions again, but this time in a very real context. After the block of *Desire Lines* starting with the transition scene, including the intermission, and ending with the two rehearsing students scrambling offstage, the audience could no longer see the Black Box as entirely a place of fictional spaces or purely as a "real" theater space.

The last scene in *Desire Lines* fully brings the "place" of the Black Box and the spaces we created during the performance into alignment. Throughout the second act, once the fluorescent lights were switched off, we had returned to theatrical spaces, but the scenes more often than not took on a more somber and less fantastical tone, tackling darker themes than in the first act. After a quiet scene set in a hospital group therapy session that was a direct reference to *Fun!* and involved the loss people feel when a person integral to the creation of a space dies or leaves, music began to punctuate the last spoken line in the show. As the music

began, the lights, shining through the cloth hung in front of them, began an animated sequence aligning with the notes in the song. As the song ramped up, the cast jumped to action, pulling every prop used in every scene in both acts of *Desire Lines*, and placing them center stage on what becomes a shrine to every space we had created over the course of the performance. The lights, which “sung” to close out the first act, now danced to music as both the place and many spaces of *Desire Lines* and the Black Box itself coalesced to become visible simultaneously. Rather than foregrounding either space or place to explore how they operated, or holding them in dynamic tension with one another, we ended *Desire Lines* by making them both visible simultaneously, uniting them as they truly exist in everyday life, as inherent to one another and co/existing.

De Certeau differentiated the terms “space” and “place” and set them in an intrinsic relationship to one another. “Place” is the materiality of a built environment, and “space” is the way that people perceive and practice a built environment—the terms are not interchangeable, but one cannot operate without the other. We interwove this relationship throughout the structure of *Deire Lines* by first pulling the concepts apart through our in/action (i.e., the audience was confronted with “place” as they entered the Black Box without our explicit intervention versus the spaces we purposely created). After exploring the concepts separately we then integrated them, allowing the essential tension between them to drive the remainder of the performance. “Place” and “space” are always in tension when individuals exist within and/or interact with a built environment, and the heterotopia of the Black Box allowed us to temporarily suspend the rules of that tension in order to examine it in more detail. Without

verbally detailing our usage of space/place to our audience, we used the structure of our performance to demonstrate the process of “spacing” places.

“I Think It’s the Lights” or, Dérive on Purpose

About two weeks before we were prepared for our first full run-through, our cast was taking a staggered approach to rehearsal. Some of us worked in small groups to finish writing scenes, while another group worked on blocking completed scenes in the Black Box. Although I opted not to discuss with the cast the technique of *dérive* or how I hoped it would emerge in the production process to help shape *Desire Lines*, I did take some inspiration from Debord to decide how best to format our rehearsals. Namely, I encouraged the cast to work in small groups and, in the face of indecision, to play, all of which I hoped would help facilitate heterotopic *dérive*. After one of these blocking sessions, while waiting for another group to finish writing, I pulled the control board for our theatrical lighting system out from the media closet to test an idea I had for a lighting cue. At this point in the rehearsal process, we were uncertain about how to light the stage for both acts of the production. Although we eventually decided to leave the lights where they were and to drape a cloth across them for the second act, at this moment we were considering moving the light trees so we could reconfigure them at an angle to illuminate both sides of the Black Box. A cast member approached me, confused about why I would be planning a light cue when we had not yet determined where we would ultimately place the lights. I explained that I was testing an idea, and that re-creating the idea once the lights were moved would be trivial. Really though, I just wanted to play.

I had created lighting cues for three other productions during my graduate career at UNT. With each successive production, the tech had become more complicated, and I was determined that *Desire Lines* would surpass them all. I began, as I always do, by checking the 24 programmable preset switches (23 of which still have their levers attached) to see if the tech operator for the previous production had left any interesting presets I could use. The answer was no; however, as I flipped through each preset, blinding my cast and heating the Black Box to unacceptable levels, I contemplated the little buzz that each light made as it activated. The Black Box's lights, like its PA system, are *finicky*, *fragile*, and *noisy*. When not properly plugged in to multiple outlets, the lights cause power outages in the Black Box, which can stop rehearsals and performances in their tracks. Their screws for mounting the instruments to the trees are worn, and certain lights will not hold their position for long, which requires constant resetting. However, *noisy* became the trait most important in this moment. In the transition between presets, or between a blackout and a full wash, the lights make a buzz that has become a constant in every Black Box production making use of them.

I have no idea why I had never listened to the lights buzzing before, or what possessed me to pay attention to them in that moment, but within a couple minutes I had worked out the rules of the buzzing. First, each light had its own specific tone, some louder than others, though the pitch of each tone was not consistent. Second, the lights only buzzed when they were *just* activated—once they were producing enough light, they went silent. Effectively, the lights buzzed only in transitions between scenes, and transitions happened most often when we wished to transform space. Another idea possessed me and, again, I gave little thought to the origin of the idea to create two animated presets. The Black Box's antiquated light control

board is an (at first) inscrutable set of buttons and switches; each label is a hopelessly abbreviated indicator of... something or other. The only surviving documentation is a two-page instruction sheet made by a previous tech operator more organizationally-inclined than I am. In my years of poking and prodding at the board, however, I had developed a few tricks. Most importantly, I could create light “animations,” lights activating in a sequence I could control from the light board. Over the next ten minutes, I set the lights to trigger on and off individually in two overlapping sequences, setting each to activate without giving off any light, but with each instrument still making its little buzz. The first sequence was unorganized; each ‘frame’ of animation had different lights that I chose on a whim buzzing at random intervals. For the second sequence, I programmed each of the sixteen lights to trigger in sequence, each buzzing after the last, creating the effect of a simple repeating single 4/4 music bar with which anyone familiar with digital percussion software might recognize. When both sequences played simultaneously, the effect was one of a steady but ever-changing rhythm, quiet to the point that one had to listen to know it was there at all, not to mention one had to be close to the lights to detect the rhythm. I realized quickly that the people who would be closest to the lights during the performance of the first act would be the audience members.

Uncertain whether I had stumbled upon something worth exploring, I called a cast member over and had him listen to what I had discovered and to offer me his first impression. This process, I realized soon after, paralleled the process the cast of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race* used when deciding to use the music stand; three of the cast members discussed the solution in a small group and decided it was a feasible staging option before presenting it to the cast as a whole. Shawn, an audio engineer and the cast member I called

over, listened for about ten seconds before he grinned at me in the way he does when he has found a new toy to play with, and said, “That’s fucking cool.” When I eventually brought the singing lights to the rest of the cast, reactions were mixed, ranging between disinterest and a/be-musement, but Shawn’s reaction was the confirmation I needed that I wanted to do *something* with this new discovery. I do not remember who said it first, it could have been me, or Shawn, or any of the other cast members, but as soon as someone said that the Black Box was “singing,” I realized that this was one of those serendipitous moments that originally led me to study the potential that heterotopic *dérive* had for use in the Black Box.

I came upon the answer to “What do we do with the singing lights?” after considering the method of foregrounding “place” which we had already decided to pursue. We had decided that we would place an intermission in the middle of the show, during which we would shift the audience’s orientation to the other side of the room. The scene following the intermission would take place “in the Black Box,” during which we would parody the way that individuals outside performance studies tend to consider the process of making performance “easy” without actually having tried it, and consequently not putting forth the effort required to create a successful performance. During this scene, we would use the Black Box’s overhead fluorescent lights, most typically used during its stints as a classroom, to “reassert” the Black Box as a physical “place” while still performing an aesthetic scene (the use of the fluorescent lights does not prohibit the use of theatrical lighting, but each makes the other redundant). It seemed to me, then, that the best place to have the Black Box “sing” would be just before the end of the first act and the beginning of the intermission, to signify the beginning of the audience’s *and* Black Box’s re/orientation. The audience would still be sitting just below the

lights during the first act, and they would need to be in close proximity to the lights for them to hear the “singing.” The audience’s necessary proximity to the lights nullified our problem of whether or not to move the lights—we should not move them if we wished for the singing to be effective (i.e., for the audience to hear them). The lights’ singing would become the final act of our foregrounding of “place” during the transition scene that ended the first act.

Second, the buzz made by the lights most often takes place during, and therefore mark, the transitional periods between the “spaces” we layer upon the Black Box during a performance. The buzz during these transitions is only audible for roughly one second before the lights have settled into their new configuration for the next scene. If I wished to extend the light’s buzzing, to let what was simply a facet of their operation become an aesthetic tool in its own right, it also seemed necessary to extend the facet of performance that they denoted. Therefore, while the rest of my cast worked on other scenes, I opted to write the aforementioned scene for *Desire Lines* which took place *inside* a transition. The transition scene, which ended the first act, led into the intermission during which we altered the Black Box and further dis/re-oriented the audience. The second act began with a “parody” scene that re/oriented the Black Box itself and the individuals who work within it.

The conceit for this transition scene originally involved another scene that, in our production process, we genuinely *meant* to write, but never did—a daytime news segment in which chippy anchors joked about the destruction of a building (the Downtown Mini Mall in Denton Texas that burned down not long after we started production) that had meant a great deal to our cast, had been the source for many props in the Black Box, and had been the focus of many discussions between the cast and me, as well as other individuals who were familiar

with both the Black Box and the Mini Mall. The scene was intended to be a satirical take on how different spaces mean different things to different people, but we simply never found the inspiration to write it. Hence, the scene taking place “inside” a transition started abruptly—the theatrical lights shone bright white, and all the sound from the PA system stopped (in fact, I again found it necessary to power down the system entirely, creating that same conspicuous silence from *Fun!* that denotes an important moment). Shawn, who had been playing a director in the previous scene, said, “Alright, that’s it for that one, set up for ‘Daytime News.’” The cast immediately sprang into action, hustling to pick up every prop, box, and setpiece on stage and attempting to take their positions—before realizing that they had no idea where they are meant to go. They argued about the different staging choices they had agreed on for this nonexistent Daytime News scene, the cacophony of which became louder and louder until finally one of the cast members interjected, “I don’t think we wrote that scene.” The cast, now lost, burst into another argument, improvised in every performance, in which they tried to assign blame and attempted to figure out how they should proceed. The scene was cacophonous and chaotic as cast members rushed to create some semblance of a purposeful scene, before another cast member, who had remained quiet, finally spoke up and silenced the others with an epiphany. “I think we’re in a transition.” The argument resumed for a third time, the cast members yelping in various states of disbelief and confusion, but she explained: “Think about it, we can do anything in here! Austin, you can play your guitar, and Cotton! You can do... whatever it is you do.” The cast took another look at each other before setting boxes in a semi-circle as chairs, placing a ball of string lights and a lamp center stage, and taking in the moment. The lights dimmed as Austin absent-mindedly picked at his guitar, and other cast members joked around

and asked each other how they thought the show is going so far, lit only by some blue lights and a color-changing lamp. I had successfully written my cast inside a transition. However, they needed something to do once they were there.

The third factor in successfully using the lights' buzzing originates in the Black Box's status as a heterotopia. Namely, the "heterochronies" or "slices of time" that operate within them. After the cast had been sitting in the transition for a few moments, the same cast member who first realized that they had entered a transition realized something else, and again quieted the cast. "Do you hear that?" Slowly, they heard the lights' buzzing, and realized the Black Box was "singing." This line prompted the cast to talk about the Black Box itself—specifically, its history. For the second time in *Desire Lines*, the history of a room was revealed to an audience, but here, rather than Jethro's fictional history of the pornographic theater, the history the cast described was of the actual room in which the cast and the audience were sitting, a history that extended beyond the fictional spaces created in our performance as well as previous performances. In revealing the actual history of the room, by both speaking it and pointing to the marks its history had left (such as a dividing line that was once a wall), the cast layered it onto the audience's perceptions of the Black Box, expanding and complicating the Black Box's role in the creation of performances within it. The "slices of time" the cast described during the transition scene involved both modes of operation that Foucault elaborated in his explanation of heterotopias (1984). First, slices of time evoked time as transitory and flowing, to which the cast spoke when they described the different roles and spaces of the Black Box. For example, the cast's account seemed confused—one cast member claimed the Black Box was once two classrooms with a wall in between them, but another cast

member responded that they “heard it was a teacher’s lounge.” This account referenced a discussion I had with a colleague in researching heterotopic *dérive*; her memory of the Black Box’s former days as two classrooms was hazy, but she seemed to remember the accoutrements of a teacher’s lounge (i.e., a refrigerator, a countertop) in her early days at the University of North Texas before the room was transformed into the Black Box. Perhaps one of the halves of the Black Box was used as a teacher’s lounge, but I did not take steps to verify this account because I wanted the history as described in the transition scene to come from the individuals who had used the Black Box, rather than searching for an “objective history” that did not reflect the impermanent nature of lived experience. Furthermore, the cast’s historical account of the Black Box contained a line about the early days of the Black Box’s use as a theater. Before the Black Box was locked, some students would spend all night in the Black Box preparing a performance for a class the next day. A schedule of Black Box events had not yet been established, and so the unlocked room facilitated unscheduled rehearsals that have been left unrecorded.

The second aspect of heterochronies involves the indefinite accumulation of time. I previously recounted the Black Box’s ever-expanding array of props that are used, left unused, and altered for successive performances. This aspect, where props from previous productions in the Black Box are reused, is certainly on display in *Desire Lines*. For example, the muslin cloth we draped in front of the theatrical lights had last been used as set dressing for a show five years earlier. However, the cast pointed to multiple other marks on the Black Box left by its history. First, and most obviously, a cast member pointed to two partial columns at opposite ends of the Black Box where the wall juts into the room. These points are where the wall

separating the rooms once stood; although the wall had been removed, a material reminder of the wall's presence remains. The architectural juts, which mask support beams, divide the Black Box in half, and the the two remainders of the former wall form a line between the stage and the audience. Next, another cast member pointed to the floor, which also represented an accumulation of history. When the wall dividing the Black Box was removed and the walls were painted black, the carpet covering the floor remained; that is, until an early Black Box performer spilled fake blood on the carpet during a performance, which left a permanent stain. Rather than leave the stain, the carpet was eventually removed and replaced with wooden flooring that could be painted the same color as the walls. The black floor in the Black Box remains as an example of how the performances affect the history of the Black Box. Heterochronies are an aspect of heterotopia, but they also allowed us to foreground the "place," the significance of the Black Box's grain (Terry, 2013). The now-wooden floor and the dividing line where a wall once stood both exemplify how the Black Box has changed, and how those changes have affected and been affected by the spaces created in it.

Finally, to complete their exploration of heterochronies within this space of transition, the cast pointed to the future. A cast member informed the rest of the cast and the audience that *Desire Lines* would be the last production to utilize the current theatrical lighting system. After years of discussion between the communication studies department and the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, the college would finally provide the department with the budget to purchase a new, up-to-date LED theatrical lighting system to replace the current Black Box lighting system. These new lights would produce much less heat than the current system and would draw much less power from the Black Box's wall outlets. In addition, the new lights

would be capable of producing any color on the color spectrum, removing the need for Black Box performers to place colored gels over the lights. The cast, upon hearing about this upcoming change to the Black Box, reacted with murmurs of amusement and anticipation. Another cast member, however, the person who originally drew attention to the lights' buzzing, offered a less optimistic opinion of the new lights: "I bet they don't sing." The cast contemplated her words with each other, as well as the changes the Black Box had already undergone, until another cast member voiced a related worry. He asked his fellow cast members what happens when, were he to come back to the Black Box years after this, he found that he no longer recognized what makes it so special to him. "I think that's okay," another cast member responded. He continued, "it just means that you get to meet it again down the road, and catch up." After a moment of silence, the cast member who first noticed the singing, who first realized that the cast was in a transition, voiced a kind of agreement: "Let's just enjoy it while we're here." To close out the transition scene, the cast looked up in silence at the black walls as I reactivated the pre-amplifier and begin playing "I Don't Feel At Home In This World Anymore," a bluegrass standard, over the speakers. "I Don't Feel At Home In This World Anymore" is a song that contains lyrics with themes of feeling safe (or, at least, tolerant) during periods of loss and change. During the cast's discussion of the Black Box's history and future, the materiality of the theater was effectively center stage, the "place" and many spaces within it simultaneously visible within the performance for the first time. During the entire scene, penetrating the "space" of transition is the "place" of the Black Box itself, its lights buzzing quietly as the cast pondered what would happen when the singing stopped.

Realizing that I could use a facet of the Black Box's "place," the singing lights, to inform a major section of the performance was the prime example of heterotopic *dérive* I encountered during the process of creating *Desire Lines*. The *dérive* aligned with multiple aspects of Debord's writing, as well as with my hypothesis for how they work in a heterotopic (rehearsal) context. The singing lights came about as a "serendipitous moment" while engaging with the materiality of the Black Box, simultaneously due to both my willingness to "let go" and allow the Black Box to guide me, and my active search for how to best use the Black Box to create the performance. Further, I first engaged with the "singing lights" in a small group (first alone, and then just with Shawn) before bringing it to the rest of the cast; this decision was not one that was arrived at by a large group. Finally, the history of the space was at play—I had heard the lights' buzzing throughout my eight years of experiencing performances in the Black Box, and part of what intrigued me was the sudden realization that I had never paid attention to it before. The heterotopic *dérive* of discovering and utilizing a facet of the Black Box I had never before consciously explored accentuated the "reassertion of 'place'" we wished to highlight when leading into the last act of *Desire Lines*.

One more major instance of heterotopic *dérive* came into play much later in the rehearsal process, less than a week before we were scheduled to premiere. The second scene in *Desire Lines*, directly after Jethro's rapid spacing of the Black Box, was one where the cast explored their thoughts and emotions about their experiences as children. The scene was constructed as an "emotional map," a dream-like stage collage of different pieces our cast had written about their childhood homes. During the scene, cast members transitioned between specific rooms in their homes that layered on top of each other through the use of different

props, lighting, and movement. The scene progressed from moment to moment, cast member to cast member, by using props to transition from one memory to the next. For example, turning on a pink neon light stick, one cast member voiced her memory of the pink neon light in her childhood bedroom, then handed it off to another cast member who used it, in his memory of home, as a lightsaber in a *Star Wars* fan film made by the kids in his neighborhood. One major transition in the sequence gave us a great deal of trouble: a dinner table that needed to transform into a swing that snapped free of the ropes holding it, sending the cast member falling to the ground. We had a lofty plan to place a piece of cardboard suspended from the ceiling by transparent wire filament on top of a table prior to each performance. Had the effect worked as intended, the cast would transform the table into the swing by simply pulling the table out from under the cardboard, leaving a floating surface that could be pushed as a swing. The cast would then cut the filament with scissors, letting the swing fall to the floor. Unfortunately, like the laser grid in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race*, the logistics of creating this effect became extremely problematic. First, the filament had to be re-cut and re-hung anew every time we wanted to reset the table for rehearsal, a task which sometimes took over half an hour to complete. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the effect more often than not looked sloppy—the scissors often did not sever the filament on the first attempt, and even when they did, any discrepancy in the cast's timing would cause the swing to slouch awkwardly to one side rather than making the satisfying slam to the ground we had hoped to achieve. As a cast, we were all invested in making this effect work, and none of us were willing to admit that, perhaps, the effect was not worth pursuing.

Initially, three or four people in our cast of ten took responsibility for cutting and hanging the filament before each performance, and eventually more and more of the cast became involved in the process that became over time increasingly troublesome. The first time I stepped in to help, we struggled over filament for almost fifty minutes. As I stood atop a step-ladder hanging the filament from a hook in the ceiling for what felt like the twentieth time, I suddenly remembered a scene from a group performance I had seen at the Petit Jean Performance Festival in Morrillton, Arkansas, the previous year. The scene involved a juggler who delivered a monologue while juggling; unfortunately, however, no one in the cast knew how to juggle. Rather than teaching a performer to juggle (and risking the juggler dropping her balls while struggling to speak and juggle at the same time), the cast constructed four or five “puppet-balls:” Styrofoam balls on long, flexible wooden sticks. The juggler performed her monologue while the rest of the cast, each handling one of the puppet-balls, created the *effect* of juggling simply by moving balls on sticks through the air. The performers made no attempt to hide the artifice of the puppet-balls; nevertheless, the effect was stunning. The cast members, in deciding to embrace artifice, were also able to achieve an additional effect that would have been impossible for a normal juggler. Towards the end of the monologue, the juggler “threw” her balls in the air and the puppeteers piloted their puppet-balls to create an animated cell, a nucleus orbited by electrons. I was still looking at the hook in the ceiling of the Black Box as I remembered this performance, and finally realized that the Black Box was heckling me in the same familiar way that it heckled the cast of *Race* when they sought to create a grid of lasers. When I connected the Black Box’s heckling with the memory of the faux-juggler, I realized that we should just have some cast members hold the piece of cardboard. In true *dérive* fashion, I

first brought it up to another cast member as we were walking out of rehearsal, and he agreed. The next rehearsal, I explained the situation to the rest of the cast: the table was taking too long, being too troublesome, and the effect never looked as impressive as we had imagined it would. I suggested that the answer was to embrace artifice, and told them about the puppet-balls. Rather than spending a sixth to a third of every rehearsal setting one effect, we instead had two cast members hold the piece of cardboard as another two pulled the table out from underneath. The fifth cast member, who was recounting her childhood memory, simply “pushed” the cardboard swing as the cast members holding it glided it back and forth. The cast was slightly deflated by this choice because we had all devoted so many hours to making the original effect work; however, the time pressure of being so close to the opening of the show helped them to see the wisdom of the solution and to accept it. When we first rehearsed the new effect at a subsequent rehearsal, we immediately realized that we, too, could achieve a further effect that was impossible with a filament-suspended table; when the swing broke, we were able to accentuate the dream-like nature of the scene by having the two cast members holding the swing gently push it side-to-side as it fell, floating slowly, like a feather, to the ground.

As a final point about heterotopic *dérive*, I turn to an aspect Debord ascribed to the concept of *dérive* without much elaboration: storms. Over the course of the two months my cast and I were together, we got comfortable with the Black Box to the point that we became just as interested in trading stories, brainstorming, and experiencing the space as we were with running scenes. The frequent, leisurely turns in our rehearsal sessions in the Black Box stood in stark contrast to the looming deadline under which we huddled throughout the process. This

deadline aligns with the “storm” I described previously—Debord (1958) wrote that storms “are rather favorable to dérives” (p. 4). My hypothesis was that the deadline of our opening—the first night a public audience would storm into the Black Box to see *Desire Lines*—would force us in specific directions with regard to rehearsal, much as precipitation brings people in urban environments together under dry awnings or in lobbies. To speak in social scientific terms, my hypothesis was supported by our experiences. Our “storm” was much more than merely favorable, and I cannot emphasize enough what a defining factor that the storm/deadline was for the dérives (the lights, the table/swing) in which we were engaged. Our first month of rehearsal was more a writing workshop, in which we completed writing prompts and discussed our answers while seated around a table. At the start of our second, final month, we had a selection of short unrelated pieces by the cast and a few ideas about what we might like to say and demonstrate about space. While I cannot speak for the entire cast, I certainly questioned at that point whether we were going to be able to construct an entire performance within a month. When I expressed this concern to professors, colleagues, and friends, every director with whom I spoke responded with some version of, “A lot can happen in a month. You will be shocked at what you and your cast can do in the face of a deadline.” People expressed this sentiment to me so frequently that I began to understand it as a sort of performance studies mantra, one I was not certain I believed. However, looking back at *Desire Lines* and all we accomplished in an extremely limited time, I now believe.

We designed the structure of *Desire Lines* to explore space and place—first separately, then as they work in conjunction with one another—and keeping an eye out for the factors that make up heterotopic dérive helped me heighten that exploration. The two instances of

heterotopic *dérive* I encountered during the rehearsal process came about when we needed a solution to a logistical problem that had to do with the space itself. In the case of the filament wire, the Black Box heckled us; the grain of the Black Box made the swing-breaking effect both problematic to set up and unimpressive in execution. The singing lights aligned perfectly with our goal of highlighting the very grain that the singing symbolized. *Dérive* is a playful method which allows individuals to engage with built environments in a different way, and we engaged in *dérive* within a heterotopic space, rather than the larger space of a city as Debord described. The two instances of heterotopic *dérive* I encountered while creating *Desire Lines* mirrored the instances I uncovered in *Big Tex Is Burning, Fun!*, and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Race* in that they were first discovered in small groups, and helped enhance the efficacy of the performances of which they were a part. The major difference between the instances in *Desire Lines* and the instances in the other shows is that, since I was already aware of heterotopic *dérive* prior to beginning the production process, I was able to recognize the concept at work almost immediately rather than uncovering it later through reflection and anecdotal evidence months or years after it occurred. The fact that I was able to recognize moments of heterotopic *dérive* in the midst of the rehearsal process indicates the potential of this research for future performer/directors who are looking to enhance their performances.

Drifting into Space

As I began the process of creating *Desire Lines*, I had some questions about the nature of heterotopic *dérive*. I sought to uncover historical, social, and spatial factors that are favorable in generating heterotopic *dérives*, and about whether performance studies scholars could

consciously utilize and/or facilitate the creation of those factors to enhance the effectiveness of their performances. Throughout the rehearsal process, I was alert for strategies I might glean from the process of creating *Desire Lines* in the hope that I could pass on that knowledge to other performers/directors wishing to more effectively utilize the ‘place’ of their performance place/spaces. However, I cannot say that I have come out of this experience with any tried-and-true methods that will guarantee that any given performer-director will have a game-changing psychogeographical encounter with their performance place/space, for a few reasons.

The first major strategy involved the information I presented to my cast. I did not reveal the extent of my research into heterotopic *dérive* to my cast until two days before our opening, but I attempted to operate rehearsals in a way that I hoped would facilitate the creation of heterotopic *dérive*. As mentioned in the rationale, going into rehearsals I believed that had I given my cast a full explanation of heterotopic *dérive* and what I was looking for, we may have “forced” our way to those serendipitous moments, negatively affecting what I was attempting to accomplish. When rehearsals started, I told the cast that I was withholding information on my research from them, but that our process would involve them taking much more responsibility than they would in a more traditional theatrical production—they would be expected to help construct the show itself, rather than just coming in having learned their lines and expecting me, as the director, to provide the staging. Further, different casts respond differently to direction (or, in this case, in-direction). Overall, we could not have successfully presented *Desire Lines* in front of an audience without the cast’s contributions. Occasionally however, some cast members would look to me for direction in situations in which I had hoped they would “let go” and play in order to figure out a solution, which would have been more in

keeping with the strategies Debord (1956) suggested were favorable for dérives. These situations were barely ever a setback, but when they occurred I was often struck with the question of whether they would have been helped if I had explained my focus on heterotopic dérive more explicitly and why I felt an imperative to share the responsibilities of these decisions with them. Ultimately I kept heterotopic dérive to myself until the end of the rehearsal process; however, another director might try a different strategy. Every cast, as most directors know, is different; therefore, I honestly cannot say whether such direct intervention—allowing myself to be more open with the focus of my research and its connection to the production process—would have helped or hindered the production.

Second, I had more constant access to the Black Box than performers at other institutions/theaters might. For example, our cast was able to use the Black Box throughout our rehearsal process, whereas other performers, as I noted previously, must use secondary rehearsal spaces and then transfer their performances to another space when the time comes for final rehearsals leading up to the public performances. I find it a blessing and a privilege that I was able to use the Black Box throughout the rehearsal process and to present the final product. Further, I have had eight years of experience seeing and creating performances in the Black Box; therefore, I have a more intimate understanding of the space in which I was privileged to work than most performers do.

Third, productions in our Black Box usually qualify as “poor theatre,” and *Desire Lines* was no exception. The budgets for Black Box productions are miniscule; thus, productions usually focus on what the performers are able to achieve through embodiment rather the accouterment associated with more traditional theatres. My budget for creating *Desire Lines*

was 250 dollars. I used 20 of those dollars to buy script binders for my cast; most of the rest of the money went toward publicity and programs for the show. Consequently, all of our props were either paid for personally by cast members, brought from our homes, or found. Also, the Black Box has no dedicated crew operating the technology for productions. Everyone who uses the Black Box also has another responsibility within the communication studies department. For example, I am a full-time graduate student and teaching assistant, and I had to balance my time spent as director and tech operator for *Desire Lines* with the time commitments of the other two commitments. All of my cast members were similarly balancing their roles in *Desire Lines* with their assorted jobs and classwork. Even the Black Box manager must negotiate her responsibilities of maintaining and scheduling the Black Box with her other positions as a faculty member and as an undergraduate student advisor for the department.

While I cannot give any suggestions guaranteed to inspire heterotopic *dérive*, I can speak to a couple simple decisions I made, and processes in which I engaged, that I am convinced were favorable to our process. First, my cast were all essentially known quantities. I did not enter the audition process with the explicit intention of only casting individuals with whom I had worked in the past. However, when auditions were complete and the time came to make a final decision with regard to the composition of my cast, I felt passionately that the correct decision was to cast people I knew, people with whom I had performed, whom I had seen perform or, in one case, an individual in whom I had absolute confidence because of our many years of thought-provoking conversations. Having a cast of individuals with whom one is familiar is, of course, unnecessary for a creating a successful performance. However, for me, an important take-away, especially in the process of creating a devised performance, is that one

should choose a cast based on their drive and their willingness to experiment, play, and work through mistakes—all traits I deem necessary for a devised performance. Second, I went to extreme lengths to cultivate a positive rehearsal environment. I took inspiration and warning from my favorite directors of Black Box productions, and rehearsals (good and bad) of which I had been a part or observed during my many roles as tech operator. I also took inspiration from the writing of director David Lynch, who strives to keep a positive atmosphere on the sets of his films even, and especially, when working on content with dark thematic elements (Lynch, 2007). I absolutely reject the “method” of directors, for example, who berate performers to the point of tears to get the performance they want, and instead let performers take the reins in many situations. I listened to the cast, asked them what they thought would be the best course of action (i.e., what scenes we should work on, who should work on what, etc.) and, as much as possible, refrained from asking them to do something I was not willing to do myself.

Exemplifying the utility of the latter, helping my cast hang the table/swing from the ceiling led to the solution that made the effect eventually work. I am sure that my directorial style was not perfect, but I came out of *Desire Lines* as a staunch believer in a positive production environment. Other researchers might continue examining heterotopic *dérive* with different types of casts (e.g., casts with less performance experience, casts with less access to their performance space), working with non-devised scripts, and/or by investigating how heterotopic *dérive* operates in productions not explicitly examining space and place. In any case, I believe that maintaining a positive, supportive, and playful rehearsal environment is important in fostering heterotopic *dérive*.

I have one final speculation on how my (and eventually our) conscious effort to explore heterotopic *dérive* led to psychogeographical effects bleeding through into *Desire Lines* itself. During the section of the production that ended the first act and began the second act of the performance—from the scene taking place in a transition to the scene that culminated with the two “Aviation Logistics” majors scrambling out of the Black Box—we shifted the audience’s perception of the Black Box in an attempt to allow them to view space in a different way. After this block of material, the performers resumed the practice of creating a succession of fictional spaces before giving way, in the final scene, to space and place operating simultaneously. “Psychogeography encourages us to buck the rut, to follow some new logic that lets us experience our landscape anew, that forces us to truly see what we’d otherwise ignore” (Hart, 2004, para. 2). In creating such an unexpected shift, foregrounding place in an unorthodox scene set in a transition, then focusing the audience’s perspective (figuratively as well as literally) on the space as they entered after the intermission, we were encouraging them to view the Black Box anew. In moving the audience, we took the audience off a predictable path (in this case, sitting and watching an entire performance from one perspective) and attempted to jolt “them into a new awareness” of the places and spaces they occupy. This shift culminated in the final scene of the production where the “place” of the Black Box and every space from the performance, which had all been layered atop each other over the course of the performance, were no longer temporally separated. Hart (2004) described psychogeography as a “toy box full of playful, inventive strategies for exploring cities” (para. 2). Every prop from *Desire Lines*, all of which were used multiple times in the production, were placed in a shrine extending from center stage to stage left, each prop symbolizing one or more spaces evoked during the

production. Combined with the dancing lights, this shrine could be described as our toy box of inventive strategies for exploring the heterotopia that is the Black Box. Our toy box aligns with Hart's psychogeographical toy box metaphor in that each toy within it constituted either a strategy or a symbol of a different way to "space" a "place."

Individuals engaged in psychogeography use their toy boxes to understand how a built environment affects the people who use it. The Black Box, a heterotopia, is a "slippery social actor," as is the Aeropagos rock (Terry, 2010), in which normal modes of operation are suspended such that its effects on the people within it can be examined in detail. My awareness and use of psychogeographical strategies within a heterotopia, most prominently *dérive*, allowed me to help my cast construct scenes that highlight specific aspects of place and space, which in turn allowed us to show space and place in their co/existence with more clarity than is possible from outside of a heterotopia. The "place" of the Black Box, its materiality/grain (Terry, 2013), affected and is affected by the spaces it creates in conjunction with the performers within it. Ultimately, I cannot claim with any confidence that, through the creation of *Desire Lines*, we had any explicitly psychogeographical effect on (let alone created a *dérive* for) our audience. However, I believe that we created the potential for an audience member to have their own "serendipitous moment" within the place/space of the Black Box.

The historical, spatial, and social factors present in the Black Box during the rehearsal process for *Desire Lines* were favorable for the creation of heterotopic *dérive*. The Black Box's history as a theatrical space and my extensive history working within it eased my task of recognizing and utilizing new facets of the space to create *Desire Lines*. For example, my discovery about the buzz made by the lights when they are first activated was significant in large

part due to my previous experiences with the theatrical lighting system. Had *Desire Lines* been the first Black Box production of which I had been a part, I would not have considered the buzzing significant—only after years of hearing the buzz did I understand it as a consistent facet of major Black Box performances. Another major factor in my search for heterotopic *dérive* involved my understanding of the Black Box as having agency. I began anthropomorphizing the space, and treating it, in a sense, as alive. I have observed people treat their belongings (such as motor vehicles) as having agency and personality, and I began to adopt a similar mindset during rehearsals. I never went as far as verbally speaking with the Black Box, but that is due to English not being the language with which the Black Box communicates. Instead, I paid attention to its grain (Terry, 2013), the way it heckled at the effects we tried (like the filament wire), the way it sounded and felt (such as with the buzzing lights and the heat they emit while activated). Effectively, I tried as best I could to listen to the Black Box on its own terms, and, to the best of my ability, constructed *Desire Lines* to highlight the place and the power of its spaces.

I consider *Desire Lines* a success. The product itself, judging by the reactions of many audience members, was a relatable and emotional experience for individuals who both had and did not have previous experiences with Black Box performances. The rehearsal process was also successful—the cast dynamic was one of the most positive and drama-free I have ever experienced, and uncovering multiple instances of heterotopic *dérive* felt gratifying. If I have a single piece of advice for future performers/directors hoping to engender instances of heterotopic *dérive*, it is that they should strive to listen to the spaces in which they perform. The performers in *Desire Lines* were privileged in that the cast had the opportunity to create the

work inside the theater space in which it would eventually be performed for an audience. Many theatrical productions must use a secondary space, which would necessarily make heterotopic *dérive* much less likely. However, this simple piece of advice is based on my belief that performances in the Black Box are made more effective when performers/directors take the Black Box itself into account when constructing them.

APPENDIX A

DESIRE LINES SCRIPT

Desire Lines

Director: Jesse Snider

Assistant Directors: Adeline Ballard and Liz King

Writers and Performers: Shawn Baker, Adeline Ballard, Jayme Carrico, Cotton Hensley,
Liz King, Annaliese Ludecke, Stephen Maxon, Jose Rodriguez, Jesse Snider, and
Austin Swarts

Scene 1: The Town's First Police Station

COTTON/JETHRO

(COTTON/JETHRO rummages through the cavity in the hinged block. Pulls out a whole orange and holds it up to the light with pride and relief.)

Thank god.

(COTTON/JETHRO moves slowly center stage, holding his hip with painful effort, and bites the orange to begin the peeling process, and upon revealing the orange's innards takes a big smell and looks pleased. Only now does he acknowledge the audience.)

Alright folks. Sorry to keep you waiting. Thanks for coming in on a rainy day like 'is. We'll start here in just a few minutes, but since we're waiting, why don't I tell you a little bit about the history of this building?

(Takes another smell of his orange.)

Don't you just love a fresh orange?

Well you see, back in the day, this was aaaaaa!!!! orange groves, far as the eye could see! Back then, you could go to the farmer and, if you gave him a bottle of hooch, he'd let you pick as many pumpkins as you could carry home.

Our village became a township, or a small city. I forget what we settled on, but legally we were the one that was big enough to where the county still wanted our oranges but not to give us the cops to guard them from pumpkin bandits. So, we built the town's very first police station!

Now, this was a different time, that i *think* existed, when police weren't all about busting heads, and taking names, and harassing innocent and upstanding business owners, they cared first and foremost about supporting their community - Sure, there was a jail, and other things that make a police station a police station, but! ***(Runs and motions to USR)*** Over here is where Officer Duncan planned our town's many parades and festivals, and come harvest season, the department would hold orange picking parties for all the children in town, free of charge!

A course that was before the war, and when uncle Sammy called we answered ***(salutes)***—and this became a napalm factory. Yessiree, jellied gasoline came out of here by the truckload and all a man needed to do was take a deep breath within 5 miles of the plant to get high for free!

(Breathes in and out once with pride. Breathes again; significantly heavier.)

But then they shut down the factory and planted a pumpkin patch, and if you gave the farmer some jellied gasoline to huff he'd let you pick as many mushrooms as you could find!

But then the war came again, ***(salutes incorrectly)*** and uncle Sammy needed his brave boys and girls to once do their solemn service, so they dug up all the pumpkin trees and this place became a cathouse where the soldiers from the nearby coast guard barracks could let off a little steam.

By fucking prostitutes.

Why, if you slipped the bouncer some mushrooms, he'd chase you out for handing him mushrooms and yell "don't bring me any more goddamn oranges!" Ha Ha Haa!

Anyway, it was pretty quickly abandoned; ransacked; left unused -- officially. For about, oh, half a decade, it saw sporadic use as various squatters villages, hippie communes, and a 8 n' a half month stint as a gang clubhouse.

They made bicycles there, if I recall.

Then, Mayor Fischer got told by some committee or another that a fella livin' here called *Road Hog* had established some sort of *war council* (and was leading him in the polls by ten points), so he got the town mob together and told them, "We need to clean that place out, because our community is a unit, its own entity. A body with its own interconnected systems functioning as a whole, the brain, the liver, the stomach, the *lungs*, the blood, the meth stains, and the other bodily fluids, and we're going to have to mop all of this up, because the old place still *has some life* in her." And after a little white-washing and closet-skeletoning, this building had its grand reopening: Jeremiah B. Fisher Pumpkin Patch Middle School.

It was a sight to see - you can't imagine how happy it made all the townsfolk to see little feet running up and down this area again after such a long time! But it closed down, when they realized two things. One, that its first graduating class had immediately established a black market economy of napalm-tainted oranges!

(*Sniffs orange, takes a bite*)

They called it “juicing.” (***Winks.***) And two, the building was in no quantifiable way living up to health code!

So, of course, then it became a Denny’s. It got bought by the hottest new business in town: Radio Shack! Now I can’t really remember what exactly happened between then and now, but this place, in the end, became a dirty, dirty pornographic movie theater.

So, enough of my jabberjawing: the movie is finally about to start. Ass Blasters 7, what a treat!

(COTTON/JETHRO rolls out a wide-screen television to center stage, then backs out of the room as he delivers the end of his monologue)

So enjoy, and remember the rules: clean up after yourself, don’t touch or talk to anyone, and if you bring me 10 dollars after the show I’ll give you one of my napalm oranges! Don’t tell the cops you found this place!

(COTTON/JETHRO shuts the lights off as he leaves the room.)

The opening of the film Ass Blasters 7 begins to play until the television screen and then fades to static. ANNALIESE and JESSE roll the television off stage.)



Scene 2: Emotional Map

(Blackout. AUSTIN enters and takes a white sheet off the hung portrait that is an empty frame JAYME poses behind)

AUSTIN

(lights match)

There is a painting on the wall of a black cat. It looks like our old cat, Tabitha. One night I stare at the picture intently and contemplate death.

(AUSTIN blows out match. JAYME steps out from portrait and turns on a lamp,

COTTON takes her place as the portrait subject)

JAYME

This portrait is very old. It hung in my dad's childhood home. He and his siblings called her the mean lady and were afraid of her. Sometimes I stand in front of my ancestor and wonder what her life was like. Does she like living in the dining room?

COTTON

(from behind frame)

The "dead people" room.

(JAYME yelps in surprise;

COTTON steps out from behind frame and walks around towards table)

All the heirlooms we've inherited are in this room.

(lights a prayer candle)

It's not much of a mausoleum, we use these things.

(Annaliese takes white sheet from ground)

We decorate the antique dining table with my great-grandmother's table cloths,

SHAWN

my grandma's sterling silver,

AUSTIN

(hangs table cloth on hanger as if it's a wedding dress)

mom's wedding china.

COTTON

We do this for family birthdays and holidays. My mom is very adamant about using these things.

(SHAWN sits at table in front of hung dress)

SHAWN

Other than images in my mind of guests in here during dinner parties

(a CAST MEMBER serves Tony's pizza box to SHAWN)

and several dozen images of me eating oven-baked Tony's pizzas, this is the space of Family Meetings,

(TWO CAST MEMBERS stretch the fabric and a light shines from behind to reveal the distorted shadows to two parents)

the big one being when my parents told us they were getting divorced. I'm sure I was sad, but my memory of it now is dominated by a sense of displacement.

(light moves, distorting shadows further)

It was this moment that shattered the entire space of that house *(pull down cloth?)*.

(STEPHEN sits on other side of table as SHAWN gets up)

STEPHEN

We rarely had family dinners here. We primarily use the kitchen table to store things on.

(STEPHEN reaches down and sets down record player)

It is upsetting.

(STEPHEN opens Tony's pizza box and pulls out a vinyl record and plays it)

The piano was the source of a great deal of disgruntlement in my youth, where I had to practice all my songs four times in a row every day.

(TWO CAST MEMBERS move the table under and out from the “swing” while another removes the vinyl player. ANNALIESE gently pushes the swing)

ANNALIESE

My favorite space was the backyard. Most of the time, I would sit on the swing and imagine what kind of life I would have. I never had a problem growing up on the swing. One day, in perhaps the swings greatest lesson in adulthood, the chains snapped and sent me hurtling into the fence.

(Four people come forward with scissors and cut the fishing wire. ANNALIESE takes something ‘childlike’ off, such as a bow or candy, and drops it into the fire pit created by the dropped swing)

AUSTIN

(moves towards ANNALIESE, looks at dropped item.

Others hang Christmas lights.)

I realized Santa wasn't real in my bedroom. I don't know what prompted this moment of clarity, but if I wasn't issuing a monologue out loud, I might as well have been. I decided I would be a kid who knew the truth. And I would discuss the truth with other members of the Mature Youth Club.

(A CAST MEMBER walks by carrying paper grocery bag. AUSTIN takes the bag and reaches in to find a Christmas present. He unwraps the gift as he speaks)

Actually, I do remember what caused this. My grandparents were in town and I helped my grandmother get groceries out of the car. We popped the trunk, and under

the moonlight I saw gifts. Something in me new these were meant to be from Santa.
(opens box and empties stuffing inside) And so he died. I don't miss him.

JAYME

(picks up stuffing and walks towards campfire)

I know the torn stuffed animals on the floor look menacing but if you use your imagination they are in a very well established medical facility run by the Muppets and myself. There is nothing on the walls but there are toys on the ground ***(drops stuffing in campfire)*** and that's what matters. But to get the full experience you really need to come back at night. There is no light here except a pink neon strip my dad hung on the wall.

(A CAST MEMBER hangs and turns on pink light)

My sister and I love how it glows while we talk on the mattress we share on the floor. Until the tree roaches come.

(in the dark CAST MEMBERS make skittering noises on walls/floors/boxes with their fingernails)

They love the neon glow and they are huge, as big as bats. And we have a bat in the room that we use just for the roaches, to swat them away. It is horrible and exciting and you simply have to squeal.

(JAYME squeals as ANNALIESE swings pink light in a lightsaber duel)

ANNALIESE

Star Wars gave me the joy of wandering, exploring youth. I was in a Star Wars fan film my best friend across the street made for school. I was made the X-wing pilot

who died in the action piece that started the film off. I hung out with the “crew” the rest of the day, helping carry set pieces and whatever the hell else needed doing.

(ANNALIESE and ANOTHER CAST MEMBER carry out door and set it sideways on ground)

As we wrapped filming in the neighborhood park, my friend suddenly turned to me and handed me a space gun. It was revealed to everyone that my character survived, having crashed on this planet that looked *just* like our park, and saved the day.

JOSE

(JOSE peaks up behind the door and is handed the space gun)

I remember playing a video game that was one of the most beautiful things I’d ever seen—you start inside a crashed spaceship that’s *cramped and spooky*, but then you get outside and are presented with a giant canyon with a far off waterfall you can *explore*. It was like a *gorgeous* painting you could walk through. I remember my 10-year-old self telling my dad that “they ruin this beautiful world by making you *kill* in it.”

(A deep, menacing rumble is heard. The ENTIRE CAST looks around them and starts moving toward the center campfire they built.)

STEPHEN

It reminds me of how sometimes it felt like drowning in my own home.

AUSTIN

I think we wanted to all be on the ground level--me, my sister, my Mom.

COTTON

We all sat in the bathtub. I peek out over the mattress my mother covered us with. She held my dad's hand, who held the door closed, he looked terrified.

Scene 3: Gym/Temple

OMINOUS VOICE (over PA system)

Welcome, novitiate. Your training begins in earnest today. The great church father St. Augustine once said, "Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility." Today, you will lower yourself in the temple compound, as your brothers for generations have before you, seeking the shrines and relics within as a dying man in the desert to water, as a moth to flame. Here there is nothing more than an idea of you, something to strive towards as you use your body to plant Augustine's tower. These shrines, they will shape you, like a sculptor does his eventual work inside.

(STEPHEN/LEAD MONK enters)

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

Now, brother, are you ready?

COTTON/NOVITIATE

(nods then takes off rope belt and puts on lifting belt)

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

Welcome to the Church of the Holy Cross...Fit

(COTTON/NOVITIATE does dead lifts)

Remember novitiate, we lift the dead things to remember how light it is to be alive. Now, what are the first two of the five commandments

COTTON/NOVITIATE

Respect thine equipment. This means returning weights and wiping down benches.

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

And the second?

COTTON/NOVITIATE

Leave thine ego at the door. In this holy ground your spirit is fractured. There is no you; only what you may be.

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

Very good. Now Novitiate, God may be able to conjure up a rock so heavy that even He couldn't lift it, but I'm gonna lift this shit like it's a sack of potatoes. Now, spot me.

PREACHER CURLS

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

In the olden time, our forefathers lived holy destitute lives and could not afford such luxuries as dumbbells or barbells, so they used their ancient tomes.

(hands COTTON/NOVITIATE Arnold Schwarzenegger's Encyclopedia of Bodybuilding)

COTTON/NOVITIATE

What is this, Guide of Iron?

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

Every temple must have a bible. This book keeps us disciplined and keeps our form pure. What are the next two commandments, Novitiate?

COTTON/NOVITIATE

We must follow the holy Whey.

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK:

And why is that?

COTTON/NOVITIATE

Because it's the second-best source of protein next to eggs and fish.

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

And the next commandment?

COTTON/NOVITIATE

The holy and true path has been laid down over generations by our predecessors. Stick to the workout plan. Do not wander in this holy space. It is not for self-discovery, but for realization of the divine plan.

(COTTON/NOVITIATE struggles with squats)

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

(frustrated)

Come on! Tighten those glutes. Explode upward from your heels. Embrace the pain. Watch your form. To shake so much during the squat is deeply sinful.

COTTON/NOVITIATE

I can't do it.

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

WHAT IS THE LAST COMMANDMENT?

COTTON/NOVITIATE

I can't.

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

WHAT IS THE LAST COMMANDMENT?

COTTON/NOVITIATE

I—

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

(in demonic voice) SAY IT!

COTTON/NOVITIATE

The final and holiest commandment is “No pain. No Gain.”

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

(stares with judgmental eyes)

(COTTON/NOVITIATE collapses to his knees)

COTTON/NOVITIATE

Guide of Iron, I must confess the sins within my muscles and joints. I cannot simply rid myself of these sins because they are a part of me. Many months ago, I was diagnosed with the condition known as Rheumatoid Arthritis, an autoimmune disease that . . .

(COTTON/NOVITIATE ad libs)

I am familiar with your ways. Forgive me for using such casual speak, Guide of Iron, but this isn't my first rodeo. I know this equipment. I've felt these mats. I've looked in the mirrors of other orders and I look the same in them as I do in this order.

(STEPHEN/LEAD MONK looks frustrated)

Were that my faith was as strong as your one rep max bench press. Forgive me for sounding as a heretic, but how am I supposed to follow your commandments if my own body won't allow it. The second commandment calls for me to leave my ego at the door, but I have no choice but to carry my ego with me. I care for my body. I must. It tells me to lower myself and strive for a better future for my body, but what if that future is simply preserving what I have, now.

(STEPHEN/LEAD MONK looks shocked)

The fourth commandment: Stick to the workout plan is one of great concern to me because I'm afraid of how detrimental the plan may be. If my knees won't allow me the effort to get that fucking pump, then the plan is flawed for my use. It surely can't fit everyone.

Finally. Perhaps most importantly. I gain nothing from this pain. How must I decipher the good pain from the bad? I am always in pain. I am riddled with fatigue. Which leads me to my final concern. If my body won't allow me to follow your laws to the letter, how should I use this space and how will it use me? How could it use me? Or should it use me?

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

This is all heresy. Who implanted these subversive and incorrect ideas into your head?

COTTON/NOVITIATE

After my diagnosis, I was just reading some stuff on WebMD.

ANNALIESE/DOCTOR

I'm sorry. I thought I heard someone say WebMD and I felt the urge to correct some misinformation.

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

There is no misinformation, only blasphemy being spoken right now.

COTTON/NOVITIATE

I have rheumatoid arthritis and I don't know if this shit's working out . . . no pun intended. Maybe I shouldn't even be here because I need to preserve my body instead of damaging it with intense workouts.

ANNALIESE/DOCTOR

There's nothing wrong with going to the gym, but you should be more aware of your body. Stop treating this space as the temple. Treat your body as the temple. You know it right now better than you'll ever know this space.

STEPHEN/LEAD MONK

How can you say such things on such hollow ground? Remember the holy trinity and all it's done for you. Schwarzenegger, Ferrigno, and the holy Whey.

COTTON/NOVITIATE

And this is my point of division. The ways in which I've been taught to use this space are no longer welcoming. Do I over extend myself to fit this space outside of my body, stretching myself where I really can't go, or do I confine myself to what my body can do now?

ANNALIESE/DOCTOR

What do you mean confine yourself? Do you know yourself completely now? Do you know every whorl of your fingertips, every crease when you fold your toes, everything you feel when you stretch your back? Have you uncovered every bit of yourself already? This way, that apparently Schwarzenegger and Ferrigno laid down for you, crucifying themselves doing pec flies, can teach you nothing about your body. You already know this! This space can only limit you now, it cannot teach you as much as you would exploring your body on your own. But once you find that, once you realize the infinite universes within, you can use this space anew. Have you tried yoga, man? Shit thumps, I can do handstands now.

COTTON/NOVITIATE

Oh wow!

ANNALIESE/DOCTOR

YEAH. Plus, I can touch my forehead to my knees.

COTTON/NOVITIATE

What the fuck!!!

ANNALIESE/DOCTOR

It's nuts. And all I had to do was listen to my body. That's all you have to do. Listen!

Can you hear it?

Scene 4: The Peaceful Warrior

[adapted from a story by Terry Dobson]

***(subway car with AUSTIN/NARRATOR, SHAWN/OLD MAN, ANNALIESE/MOTHER,
and JAYME/PASSENGER all seated. JOSE/DRUNKARD is off set.)***

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

(to audience)

The train clanked and rattled through the suburbs on a drowsy Spring afternoon. Our car was comparatively empty, a few housewives with their kids in tow, some old folks going shopping. I gazed absently at the drab houses and dusty hedgerows. At our next stop . . .

(CAST sways and stops; sound effect)

. . . The afternoon quiet was suddenly shattered by a man bellowing violent, incomprehensible curses.

(JOSE/DRUNKARD enters)

The man staggered into our car.

(JOSE/DRUNKARD exclaims, stumbles about car)

He wore laborer's clothing and he was big...

(JOSE/DRUNKARD leans over AUSTIN/NARRATOR and utters an expletive)

...drunk...

(JOSE/DRUNKARD leans over AUSTIN/NARRATOR and utters another expletive)

and dirty.

(JOSE/DRUNKARD leans over AUSTIN/NARRATOR and utters yet another expletive)

He swung at a woman holding a baby. The blow sent her spinning into the lap of a passenger, and it was a miracle that the baby was unharmed. Terrified, the passengers scrambled towards the other end of the car. The laborer aimed a kick at the retreating back of the mother but missed as she scuttled to safety. The train lurched ahead, the passengers frozen with fear.

I stood up. I had been putting in a solid eight hours of Aikido training every day for the past three years. I liked to throw and grapple, I thought I was tough...

(CAST transforms subway into an Aikido dojo)

The trouble was that my martial skill was untested in actual combat. As students of Aikido, we were not allowed to fight.

ANNALIESE/MOTHER (teacher)

Aikido

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

my teacher had said again and again, Aikido . . .

(spoken simultaneously with ANNALIESE/MOTHER)

Is the art of reconciliation . . .

ANNALIESE/MOTHER (teacher)

(spoken simultaneously with AUSTIN/NARRATOR)

. . . is the art of reconciliation. Whoever has the mind to fight has broken his connection with the universe. If you try to dominate people, you're already defeated. We study how to resolve conflict, not how to start it.

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

I listened to his words, I tried so hard. In my heart, however, I wanted an absolutely legitimate opportunity whereby I might save the innocent by destroying the guilty.

(CAST goes back to subway)

This is it! People are in danger, if I don't do something fast somebody will probably get hurt. Seeing me stand up, the drunk recognized the chance to focus his rage.

JOSE/DRUNKARD

Ah hah! A **(hiccup)** shit head! You need a lesson in manners!

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

I gave him a slow look of disgust and dismissal. I planned to take this asshole down, but he had to make the first move. I wanted him mad, so I pursed my lips and blew him an insolent kiss.

JOSE/DRUNKARD

Alright, *faggot*, you're gonna get a lesson!

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

He gathered himself for a rush at me, a fraction of a second before he could move someone shouted

SHAWN/OLD MAN

Hey!

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

It was earsplitting. I remember the strangely joyous, lilting quality of it. As tough you and a friend had been searching diligently for something and he had suddenly stumbled upon it.

SHAWN/OLD MAN

Hey!

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

We both stared down at a little old man. He must have been well into his seventies. He took no notice of me, but beamed delightedly at the laborer, as if he had a most important, most welcome secret to share.

SHAWN/OLD MAN

Come here. Come here and talk with me.

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

He waved his hand lightly, and the big man followed as if on a string. The drunk planted his feet belligerently in front of the old gentleman.

JOSE/DRUNKARD

Why the *hell* should I talk to you?

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

The drunk now had his back to me. If his elbow moved so much as a millimeter I'd drop his ass. The old man continued to beam at the laborer

SHAWN/OLD MAN

Whacha been drinking?

JOSE/DRUNKARD

I been drinking *Sake* and it's NONE OF YOUR GODDAMN BUSINESS!

SHAWN/OLD MAN

Oh, that's wonderful, absolutely wonderful! You see, I love *Sake*, too. Every night me and my wife, she's seventy-six you know, we warm up a little bottle of *Sake* and we take it out into the garden and we sit on our old wooden bench and we watch the sun go down and we look to see how our *Persimmon* tree is doing, my great grandfather planted that tree and we worry about whether it will recover from those ice storms we had last Winter. Our tree has done better than I expected though, especially when you consider the poor quality of the soil. It's gratifying to watch when we take our *Sake* and go out to enjoy the evening, even when it rains.

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

He looked up at the laborer, his eyes twinkling. As the drunk struggled to follow the old man's conversation, his face began to soften.

JOSE/DRUNKARD

Yeah, I love *Persimmons* too...

SHAWN/OLD MAN

Yes, and I'm sure you have a wonderful wife.

JOSE/DRUNKARD

Nah, my wife *died*...

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

Very gently, swaying with the motion of the train, the big man began to sob.

JOSE/DRUNKARD

I don't got no wife. I don't got no home. I don't got no job. I'm so ashamed of myself.

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

Tears rolled down his cheeks, a spasm of despair rippled through his body. There I was, standing in my well-scrubbed youthful innocence, my "make this world safe for Democracy" righteousness. I suddenly felt dirtier than he was. The train arrived at my stop and as the doors opened I heard the old man cluck sympathetically

SHAWN/OLD MAN

My, my, that is a difficult predicament. Sit down here and tell me about it.

AUSTIN/NARRATOR

I turned my head for one last look. The laborer was sprawled on the seat, his head leaning on the old man. As the train pulled away I sat down on a bench. What I had wanted to do with muscle had been accomplished with kind words. I had just seen Aikido tried in combat, and the essence of it is love.

Scene 5: Street Performer Soundscape

(SHAWN enters, sweeping up garbage and putting it in a trash can.)

(AUSTIN, seated starts to play Blues riff.)

(JAYME enters drunkenly looking through keys. She discovers another key set and forgets which is hers. She drops keys intermittently.)

(STEPHEN enters with briefcase, fumbling around in it for something he can't remember.)

(ANNALIESE decided that an umbrella would be a good thing to bring on a Subway.)

(COTTON enters, clicking his pen. He takes a phone call from an automated banking service and learns to use the service's stunted narrative.)

(AUSTIN begins to sing People Are Strange. During the chorus, everyone makes a noise.)

(Disperse.)

Scene 6: Monolith

SHAWN/STAN

"Without Ned McElroy, *2001, A Space Odyssey* would have just been a very long movie about a very long trip."

JOSE/NARRATOR

My brother was a very famous actor. I don't like to bring it up, because no one *really* is *impressed* by someone's proximity to a famous person. It's like, it's fun to talk about at parties, *but* does it make me any better? Does being close to greatness actually mean that I might be great too? Last time I checked, the only things that happens the closer you get to the sun is that you're more likely to get *burnt*.

(A CAST MEMBER is playing with the light and switches it on, blinding himself and yelling, "OW.")

Anyways, yes, he was a pretty famous actor. This I feel comfortable *asserting*, among his *myths and tall tales and exaggerations*. He didn't find a lot of work, but his big break was *big*—and it *broke* him. We'll get to that later. He *worked hard* in high school, doing tech work on shows his freshman and sophomore years and running sound and all that, until the first day of his junior year, when, and I'm gonna quote him *directly*, as he told it to me,

COTTON/NED

“the head of the theatre program took one look at me, and said,

ANNALIESE/DIRECTOR

“Kid, you’ve got a presence like the Holy Spirit,’

COTTON/NED

and cast me as Richard in Richard The Third.”

JOSE/NARRATOR

The acting bug *bit* him pretty *bad* after that, and he made his way into *Yale* School of *Drama*,

COTTON/NED

Class of 1960!!!!

JOSE/NARRATOR

(rolls eyes, groans)

He’d *never* forget to tell you that. Anyway, he *honed* his *chops* as an actor, and became just altogether too *charismatic*, if you ask me. If his stage presence was like the *Holy Spirit* before, he was as big as the stage now. He could fill up a room like *smoke*, as substantial as he was...*big*. That’s it. He was *big*. No hyperbole, he would *love* that too much. He was just big. His footsteps in the boots for his costume rang out like *gunshots* on stage, and *honestly*, sometimes they *hit* me like gunshots too. Sometimes *they still do*.

My brother got some bit parts in various commercials, TV shows, a couple non-speaking parts in movie, you know, but then he met *Stanley. Kubrick*. They ended up at

a Captain Beefheart show at the Whiskey-A-Go-Go in the '66, and Kubrick *drunkenly* asked my brother if he was Captain Beefheart five or six times, before Kubrick *muttered*,

SHAWN/STAN

“WELL YOU SHOULD BE,”

JOSE/NARRATOR

and invited him to audition for a part in his new sci-fi movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

(COTTON/NED and SHAWN/STAN cross to table and sit)

JOSE/NARRATOR

He arrived on set in August of that year, and he and Stanley sat down and talked for seven hours *non-stop*, without a role in mind, to figure out how Stanley could use my brother in his movie. The director, like everyone my brother met, was drawn to his *gravitas*, which encompassed more than height (he was very, very tall), or words, or *anything*. It was just him-in his *totality*. And Stanley knew this, and wanted to use his totality, his seeming *boundlessness*, in this movie, a movie about *space* and the limits of *human understanding* and *imagination*.

And there he had it—my brother wouldn't play a *hero*, not a *villain*, not a *human*, not anything. He would play a pure *presence*. And so, he was cast as the *Monolith*.

(SHAWN/STAN calls out two stage hands who carry the Monolith upstage. NED stands behind it.)

They would build this *tall, black rectangle, sleek and mysterious*, and he would stand inside of it, for the duration of the scene, and that was his *entire* role. But he made the movie. He really did.

(TWO CAST MEMBERS, performing as stage hands, turn the Monolith slowly over the next sentence, revealing COTTON/NED standing behind it, cheesing at the audience)

His sudden appearances *bracket* the movie, *ensnaring* the audience in the “Dawn of Man” segment as much as the primates in his presence, *fascinating* the astronauts later, and *comforting* (in his own strange way) the astronaut at the very end. The black box before he stepped in was just *painted black wood*, but when my brother entered, the crew *hushed*. If Kubrick *commanded* the set, he seemed to be receiving his orders from that *Monolith*.

(during this last paragraph, the scene is split into two frames with COTTON/NED as the Monolith at the center.

He turns stage right to scare performers acting as primates, turns, and then turns stage left to comfort the DYING ASTRONAUT/SHAWN laying on a table.

All the while, COTTON/NED cheesies at the audience.)

(CAST MEMBERS playing stage hands take monolith away)

My brother’s scenes were *finished* within a month. He never once *complained* about standing inside the box for six, eight hours a day. But it *changed* him. I know. In that box, he saw *infinity*. He saw limits *fall away* like leaves in the *autumn*. For him, the outer shape of the box didn’t matter, just like in the movie. The Monoliths were not *imposing* because they were black rectangles on the outside; they were imposing because of their *incredible potentiality*, the *fact* that no one knew what was inside, that there was even a chance they could be *bigger* on the inside than out.

(during the following narration, COTTON/NED goes from grinning fool to crisis-addled horror. Strange music begins playing as he descends to the floor in panic, and laser lights dance around him.)

And inside, he saw *everything*, all at once, *stretching* forward *endlessly*, but *curling* upon itself-the universe, in its cycles and newness and oldness and birth and death, the total ability to *bracket* life, to give it a beginning and an end, to frame *beauty and experience* in ways that even a person, gazing up at the stars and the inky void, trying to see oneself reflected back, could understand.

He stopped acting after that. The returns from *2001* set him up well enough for the future.

SHAWN/STAN

Even though he requested not to be credited for the role,

JOSE/NARRATOR

Stanley—

COTTON/NED

Stan

JOSE/NARRATOR

gave him some money every month too, since they became very *good* friends during the film and talked almost every day until my brother died. He never said why he quit, but just kind of *smiled* and said he could go back if he wanted, and that he got almost everything he *needed* from being in *2001*.

COTTON/NED

What else is there to play? In the Monolith, I could play everything and anything, I was kind of like that cat from that one math thing, maybe Schmidt's Cat? I don't remember, physics isn't really my bag. But inside there, it was less about me, it was about everything outside of me, surrounding me, what I could do as an actor, outside myself. And that's what acting is about, right? Not being yourself.

(COTTON/NED, sleepy and lethargic, moves to grave site between two boxes and lies down. Performers circle around his grave - performer who played Dennis Hopper is offstage.)

JOSE/NARRATOR

He was *struck* by a powder blue Dodge Aspen while crossing a street in LA and *died immediately* upon impact. After he died, we buried him in that *black* rectangle just like he wanted, and I know just what he knew when he requested it. In there, away from eyes or the sun or rain or memory, he could live forever.

(Monolith prop is placed on top of grave by four CAST MEMBERS performing as pall bearers. JOSE/NARRATOR places a prop on top of the monolith that shines the shadow of a man on the back wall.)

Scene 7: Daytime News

SHAWN

(directing voice)

Alright, that's monolith, transition to daytime news!

(CAST starts bustling at once deconstructing the monolith set, moving monolith prop to the side and carrying blocks in different directions, but all stop after a few seconds as if realizing something. All turn towards the center.)

ALL

(mumbling different lines/confused cacophony)

What were we supposed to do here? Where does this go? What? Huh? Etc.

SHAWN

What? What's wrong?

COTTON

We . . . sorry, did we ever get around to writing that?

(A beat, then an argument breaks out among the CAST)

ALL

Why didn't we write this? We didn't have time! I brought puppets! Etc.

JAYME

Wait, wait! Everybody, wait!

(Argument stops.)

SHAWN

What?

JAYME:

Don't you see what's happened?

(Walks further upstage, looks around.)

We're *in* a transition.

(JAYME lets that sink in for a moment. Then argument breaks out again.)

ALL

What do you mean? No we're not! What do we do?! Etc.

JAYME

Listen!!!! We don't ever get to just be *in* a transition. We always rush past it into the next thing. we can do anything in here!

(Murmurs of hesitant acceptance)

ANNALIESE

(turns to Jesse)

What do you think? Can we just hang out in here?

(JESSE remains silent in the tech booth with a blank expression that might be viewed as either perplexed or furious.)

CAST pulls blocks towards center and lounges in a rough semicircle. Someone brings the bouncy ball campfire to place in the middle of the group, after which the lights dim. AUSTIN starts fiddling on his guitar. Each CAST MEMBER reacts differently to the transition zone. some are uncomfortable, fiddling with whatever they're holding. Someone complains that it's stuffy in the transition zone—"there's no air in here!" Some keep looking around waiting for something to happen. some are just content to be.

After a few moments of silence, the lights start singing.

The following dialogue is somewhat quiet.)

JAYME

Do you hear that?

STEPHEN

What?

(AUSTIN stops playing)

ANNALIESE

What is that?

JAYME

I think it's the lights.

(A beat.)

STEPHEN

Oh *yeah!* What are they doing?

JAYME

I think they're . . . singing.

(Everybody listens.)

COTTON

Do they normally do this?

JOSE

I guess they only do in transitions.

ANNALIESE

Maybe no one hung around in a transition long enough to hear them.

JAYME

It's like the Black Box is singing.

(everybody is content to listen for a bit)

AUSTIN

You know, this is the last show that's going to be using these lights?

ALL

Yeah? What?! Why? Etc.

AUSTIN

Yeah, we're finally getting new fancy LED color-changing high-tech lights in here.

JAYME

I bet they don't sing.

COTTON

So, what does that mean? Will the space be unrecognizable? Will the . . . uh . . . Black Box not be able to sing anymore?

ALL

Naww . . . uhh . . . yeahh??? Etc.

ANNALIESE

Sure it will! Right??? In its own way, at least.

(conversational tone goes from quiet and reflective to excited storytelling.)

AUSTIN

This room has already changed a lot, this is just one of those changes.

ANNALIESE

The Black Box used to just be two classrooms. You can still see the dividing line where the wall used to be.

JAYME

I heard it was a teacher's lounge.

SHAWN

When it first turned into a theater space, they painted the walls black, but kept the carpet.

JOSE

. . . until someone spilled *fake blood* all over it. Then they replaced it with wood they could paint black like the walls.

ANNALIESE

People used to spend all night in here preparing for performances. You could just come in whenever.

JAYME

But then the COMM department bought . . . these lights . . .

(Gestures to lights, pause to listen to the singing again. All the lights hiss at once in response)

ANNALIESE

. . . and they locked the doors, so no one could steal them.

COTTON

That act was the black box's final transformation into what Foucault calls a heterotopia. Foucault loosely defined heterotop...

ALL

(Interrupting; groaning)

Don't ruin it! Come on!!!!!! "SHUT THE FUCK UP! Etc.

COTTON

Okay alright!!!! Look, at my grandmother's old house she had an office, and it meant a lot to me. I got in touch with the current owners of the house and asked if I could see the old place. When I went into her old office, I found that it had been turned into a bedroom, and suddenly I wasn't able to remember that room at all. What if we come back to this space in a few years and can't recognize it?

AUSTIN

I think that's okay. It just means that you get to meet it again down the road and catch up.

JAYME

So, let's enjoy it while we're here.

INTERMISSION

Scene 8: The Black Box

ADELINE

Okay, so we could only reserve Black Box during the intermission of this show.

LIZ

That's fine I am fine with that—

(Motions to flat)

Let's get this out of the way.

***(They turn flat around to reveal nine brightly colored laminated warnings from
Holley Vaughn)***

ADELINE

So, let's just put our heads together—

LIZ

Wait! That's it.

ADELINE

What?

LIZ

We have to get an A, right? We have to pass this god-forsaken performance class, right? We're Aviation Logistics majors, and I'm not going down because of a humanities elective.

ADELINE

OK! So, what's your idea?

LIZ

All the good performances have edge.

ADELINE

(nodding)

Yeah . . . they're weird.

LIZ

So, we put our heads together. We're Siamese twins. We're in a circus—an old freak show. Our names are Evelyn and Evelyn—

ADELINE

I think your just describing the album Evelyn Evelyn by Amanda Palmer.

LIZ

Damn.

ADELINE

But don't worry, I brought these . . .

(slams down stack of packets/notes)

LIZ

What's in these?

ADELINE

I don't know, they were assigned readings.

LIZ

Okay. Let's get to work.

(They crack open cans of Red Bull and down them entirely. They tear down the warning sign that says, "No Drinks!")

Just start reading from a page and we'll go from there.

ADELINE

(ADELINE opens Futurism packet. LIZ goes to whiteboard and writes down bits of what is said)

Futurism. They liked CAPS lock. "Over here there there all around above look out for your head ciaak beautiful flames flames flames flames flames leap from forts over there behind that river. Rudolf hello."

(They both stand back and nod at the board like they get it)

LIZ

What if we're at a tea party but instead of pouring tea I can pour you gasoline.

ADELINE

I'll light a fire in here, I don't care.

LIZ

Yes, I have medical bills we can use for kindling.

ADELINE

Yes! It will be a statement on the healthcare system—

LIZ

—Sea world.

ADELINE

Yeah, cuz then we can quote the Indian chief that said you poison streams and kill fish and then you can't eat money.

LIZ

The Very Hungry Caterpillar. He's eating and eating and greedy and it's just like . . .

ADELINE

Yeah, yeah. What if we're naked and we cover our boobs in peanut butter to show how men look at us like we are sandwiches. And then we could create a tablet . . .

LIZ

of the the nativity scene! And I'll be Mary because she doesn't have any lines. WHY IS THAT? THOUGH . . .

ADELINE

HEGEMONY.

(starts to write hegemony on white board)

LIZ

FEMINISM.

ADELINE

YES!

(Erases hegemony and writes FEMENISM, misspelling the word)

LIZ

(Picking up packet about color)

Okay, this says we can use color to show things.

ADELINE

We can paint ourselves blue to talk about depression and then we can hurt ourselves.

LIZ

But instead of blood, it's black, like the oil that gets on pelicans.

ADELINE

So, it's a statement on conservation

LIZ

—Sea World

(ADELINE looks contemplative)

What are you thinking?

ADELINE

Have you seen Blackfish?

LIZ

No, but I think it's so depressing that fish can be racist too.

ADELINE

(goes to the whiteboard to erase hegemony)

It just got me thinking. Sometimes I feel like I am trapped in an enclosure of established practices that I know I consent to on some level, but on another level, I feel as if I have no alternatives because the dominant powers in place have—

LIZ

Look, I know this is important to you and all, but I really need you to focus. So, we left off on the peanut butter boobs and I was thinking we could use little raisins for nipples.

ADELINE

Hey! Did you ever notice that you can't spell feminism without men?

(underlines 'men')

(The CAST enters)

LIZ

Okay, we need to figure out what we're actually doing.

ADELINE

We're . . . we're on a journey!

LIZ

Yes, we're on a journey to find . . . to find . . .

ADELINE

(digging through packets)

to find the Bauhaus.

LIZ

Why do you want to be naked so bad?

ADELINE

I've just been using this supplement that has helped me lose weight. It's called cocaine Stephanie.

(LIZ and ADELINE see THE CAST, realize their time is up and scramble from the room)

Scene 9: Le' Stoop

(ANNALIESE enters, as she walks on she looks around. Looking out toward the audience, she sits down, and lights up a joint. JAYME enters. ANNALIESE puts out her blunt and hides it. JAYME strolls toward ANNALIESE looking sheepish.)

JAYME

Oh, sorry. Hi, this is weird. Maybe I should have called ahead, but I used to live in this house a few years ago.

ANNALIESE

No shit? Did you attend the high school?

JAYME

Uhhh, no I was more on the homeschool side. My family was very religious and tried to raise me in a stricter setting. I didn't really get the experience of going to a school.

ANNALIESE

Ehhh, you didn't miss much in school school. What, like an entire grade getting the clap because of a "camping trip," he he he. My ass. What church did you go to?

JAYME

Oh, the _____ (*church name is always improvised*)

ANNALIESE

Ah, you one of them. Well, I wasn't much of a church girl myself. I would skip mass at the ol' St. Paul Lutheran hurch and go across the street to _____
(improvises small town bar name). Ya, had some real good times there. I got my first boyfriend there, he was a trucker and he taught me to use the CB. Had lots of fun nights SEXCBing.

JAYME

What?!

ANNALIESE

It's like phone sex, but over a CB. Not likely a goody two shoes like you would have known back then.

JAYME

WELL I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW (*looks around furtively*), I hung around the train tracks quite often.

ANNALIESE

So?

JAYME

Well, the groups who hung out there have quite the reputation. You know . . . for reefer?

ANNALIESE

So, what, you smoked?

JAYME

Yes, well. It was really only for a year when I was 16 but, ya, I DID IT!

ANNALIESE

I mean, that's cute. I remember my first joint was when I was 12. Me and my mom would go to the ol' laundry mat, _____ (*improvise name of laundromat*), every Tuesday, and—

JAYME:

Wait, this house has a washer and dryer though.

ANNALIESE

Ya, but not always. We didn't always have money, so we'd have to go to (*repeat name of laundromat*). There, I met Carlos, and well . . . Carlos had some connections. So, he usually got me my pot until he moved away. Good times, toking up at the laundromat. Always watching the dryers spin. MY friends loved getting high there,

then after, we'd shoot to _____ (*improvise name of diner*)
and satisfy our munchies.

JAYME

OH, you were one of those people. Do you know how hard it is to work, with y'all just sitting there taking up so much time and space. ALSO, WE KNEW YOU WERE HIGH!
Who orders Grill cheese, with mozzarella sticks on the inside, with a side of ranch to dip it in. Who in their right mind would eat that?

ANNALIESE

He he, ya, that was good, but going across the street to Jerry's Donut Shack after and getting a nice big fat one. Only made the night better. Actually, I had probably the best kiss of my life behind Jerry's.

JAYME

Oh, I had my first kiss here. I remember it so well. It was Halloween 1997.

ANNALIESE

Oh, my best smooch was also during Halloween. I remember it so well.

JAYME

I was visiting my cousins in town, this was before I lived here. They left me at the Corn Maize, and I had to get back to the main road as fast as I knew how, which everyone knows is the alley next to the bank.

ANNALIESE

I was actually on my way to the corn maize, to get blazed, on that good good. I took a shortcut, behind Jerry's . . .

JAYME and ANNALIESE

Then I was in such a rush I bumped into . . .

ANNALIESE

Sandy from Grease . . .

JAYME

The Grim Reaper . . .

(They each recognize the other person)

ANNALIESE

I was rude at first, cause this dumb bitch crashed into . . .

JAYME

And we argued for a moment, but that got us talking . . .

ANNALIESE

And one thing led to another . . .

(Their hands almost touch, recreating that moment. COTTON steps out of the prop closet and steps up on the risers behind ANNALIESE and JAYME)

COTTON

What in the hell are ya'll doing on my porch?

JAYME

(to ANNALIESE)

What, you don't live here.

ANNALIESE

No, I used to, like I said. I was just coming to visit.

COTTON

Get OUTTA HERE.

(ANNALIESE and JAYME The jump up and scramble off laughing.)

Scene 10: Mister Happy

SHAWN

Thank you for coming to my presentation; I see I have some fans in the audience, because anyone smiling is a fan of mine. I'm Mister Happy, The Optimist. The Tone Setter, The Mood Shifter, The One Who Puts The Smile On Your Face. I help wash out the bullshit, that anger, the cynicism, built up from a hellish day and keep my family All Good.

STEPHEN

My younger daughter will probably die in her 40s. That's what the statistics say.

SHAWN

And I can teach you too, backed by raw statistics! Yes, with my easy to emulate example, you too can be an atom bomb of aplomb, fusing bullshit into That Good Shit. That's copyright me, do **not** steal it.

STEPHEN

She has cystic fibrosis, a genetic disorder that causes her body's relationship with salt to be stressed beyond counseling, necessitating divorce. The children of this bad marriage is thick mucus that will wear out her lungs. Lungs are not easy to come by. Not available ones.

SHAWN

Start simple. Keep those smiles going, why is no one smiling? Come on, lemme see those teeth. Yes, very good. You can't help but smile around someone exuding this much good spirit, can you?

STEPHEN

Breathing treatments and expensive drugs is what gets her beyond childhood into her 40s. We have insurance, we're lucky. But because we live in Hell World now, thousands of kids in less fortunate families live in a nightmare worse than ours. That's probably what makes me the most angry, most of the time. The next time she's in the hospital I'll be more mad about something else. About having a sick child, a shitty genetic lottery choosing her. About my wife and I both carrying this defective gene we didn't know about . . . but should have.

SHAWN

Yes, the key is broadcast a chill and happy disposition, an infectious form of foolishness, of clownery. Not too much, of course. You don't want to go overboard, then you look like an asshole. No, just be all good, dude. Look for an opportunity for a good one liner, a good pun. That's when you'll all have fun.

STEPHEN

My wife and I have half-broken genes, that broke our daughter fully. Jesus, I gotta stop being melodramatic.

SHAWN

Be comedic! But also, be a good listener. A frustrated person, carrying the weight of the day, needs you to be an outlet, needs you to hear, to understand, to process, and give supportive comments. Even advice! You need to help your family unwind, release the shackles reality clamps to them. Only then can you replace those negative shackles, with the positive shackles of a hug of humor.

STEPHEN

Kurt Vonnegut would say “so it goes”. The cycle of life, the ubiquity of shitty circumstances and death, that affects everyone. We’re all in the same boat. That’s a good mantra. It’s also a shitty thing to tell an otherwise normal kid who is adorable as hell. You have no idea how cute. A fucking ham, living an otherwise normal life. What a world. Oh, another mantra. I gotta reign this indulgent sappy shit in.

SHAWN

(reacting)

Yeah! Indulge in some blue comedy with the spouse. You know, the kind of joke that crosses the line they pretend bothers them, but they laugh anyway. Because you know your spouse, you know your family. You know the way to break them all out of whatever funk life has dropped them into, once again. Because life can be shitty, it tends to be, these days. But you can choose a different path. Choose a different atmosphere for your family to exist in within the safe space of your home. You should be writing this down.

STEPHEN

I should be writing her life down. I think about how to document her life, like an airplane’s black box, but for an entire human being’s self. Damn, that’s fucking depressing. And a bit condescending. She’s a human being, not a multimedia project. Not some sort of viral video for the intranet of a family.

SHAWN

Family is a unit, its own entity. A body with its own interconnected systems functioning as a whole- don’t you want all those bodily functions operating at peak performance? The brain, the liver, the stomach, the **lungs**, the blood. All of it happy and hoppin’ and

helping tell the world that the story of your family, your people, is a good one. One you could watch on ABC Thursday nights as a two-camera comedy, I've already gotten our pilot written if any of you are development executives, please talk to me after this presentation. Hilarious story.

STEPHEN

My grandfather was a lawyer and a hell of a storyteller. I'm an audio producer. And my dumb ass didn't think to sit him down with his daily afternoon vodka to have him spin yarn into my tape recorder until he was too sick to do it. My daughter is a toddler, there's still time to do that for her. With her. It wouldn't be for her, would it?

SHAWN

(the previous line in the back of his head)

You do this *for* your family! You've been cast, your role is Mister Happy, and you keep the ship sailing smooth. There's no paycheck, no barter, no pension, no treasure chest, no pat on the back, other than the one you give yourself at the end of the day when your family goes to sleep happy and content. Because you defeated Negativity. You kicked Cynicism's ass, the right fucker. The prick. Only happiness in this house! Mint gold, with your help.

STEPHEN

(off on his own)

Or should she decide if she wants a black box. Shouldn't she decide how we all remember her? A production edited, produced, and directed by her. But really, isn't that also just, letting her live her life?

SHAWN

Because your job, is to help your family live their life. But happy.

Scene 11: Processing

(THE CAST performing PATIENTS are scattered around the stage engaged in their own activities focused on their objects. STEPHEN, THE COUNSELOR, walks into the room. Participants slowly move to the semi-circle of blocks and sit down.

One chair, second to the end, is still open.)

STEPHEN/COUNSELOR

Hey, Austin, you can go ahead and scoot in.

AUSTIN

No, that's okay. It's Jennifer's seat.

STEPHEN/COUNSELOR

I'm glad you brought that up. I have some good news. Jennifer was released. She went home yesterday.

(PATIENTS all react differently)

I know Jennifer was usually the first one to get things started in group discussion, so will someone else get things going today?

(STEPHEN/COUNSELOR attempts to make eye contact with each participant, waiting for someone to speak up)

AUSTIN

Jennifer always used to talk about waiting tables. That kinda makes me think of the other night. As you guys know, I work as an orderly over in the cancer wing . . . and so the other night I have this patient who I had grown really close to, like *real* close. But they're fading. Like, it's gonna be their last night. But, I'm not there as a family member,

I'm there to serve, and I got seven other patients who are all awake in the middle of the night, and one of them of course needs a bath, even though his wife is right there, I don't know why they can't help . . .

It's like high stakes waitressing. I just feel like you can't care too much or you'll die, and you can't care too little or you'll become . . . heartless.

JOSE

(shakes head)

No, that's okay, you can skip me. . . . Stop looking at me. I don't wanna talk. STOP. STOP. All your stares, what are y'all? My family? Look at me, poor me, not doing too well, BOOHOO ME. "Such a shame." I'm trying though. It's just hard. Do you know how difficult this is to do with all of you watching? Why can't therapy can't be like a confessional. No one really looking, just there able to take it at my pace. Like the process is to take one step at a time, but it feels like everyone expecting me to be doing the 400m dash, already. I'm not a good runner. ***(hyperventilating)***

SHAWN

I miss childrens' hospitals. My daughter would go to those when she was younger and very sick, in a wing for kids with CF like her. The kids and the nurses were all like little Jennifers, warm and optimistic, almost refusing to let go of smiles. It's unbelievably humbling to see a child much worse off than your own daughter joke with nurses about how his birthday present won't fit in his hospital room. My daughter gets hospitalized in your standard regional hospital now; a stale, beige hell where nurses and doctors have every right to complain about their industry and patients have every right to contract that cynicism. I choose to believe the only difference between a nurse in a

children's hospital and a standard one isn't a choice to be stronger for the children, but an inability to resist childrens' inherent state of joy and play. Society tells us children are subordinate actors, a passive project to be molded and guided. This is wrong; it's a symbiotic relationship. Without children, society would forget joy, empathy, and perspective. At least this is what I choose to believe.

JAYME

You know it's really funny how much you all liked Jessica. I honestly didn't really care for her.

(other participants seem surprised)

SHAWN

You mean Jennifer?

JAYME

Yeah

COTTON

Why didn't you like her?

JAYME

I don't really know why. I just felt like she was... inauthentic, kind of like she was putting up a front or something you know? I don't know. But the first time I met her, I didn't mean to, but I'm pretty sure I made her really uncomfortable. I asked how her Valentine's Day went. She told me a date stood her up. I told her I bet I could one-up her. My grandfather, my dad's dad, had a heart attack and died on Valentine's day. How thematically appropriate, or inappropriate. All I know is that every Valentine's Day all the hearts everywhere mean something different to me now. We were actually

visiting my mom's dad in the hospital at the time. He was really sick and had started to get dementia. My family was up there to visit. While we were up there my dad got a phone call from his mom telling us to go to the other hospital in town. That my other grandfather had a heart attack. So, we drove to the other hospital. I kept telling myself that he would be okay. They would admit him, and my family would spend yet another day in the hospital. They ushered us into a family room. A nurse came in and sat down with us. She started asking my aunt and grandma some questions about his previous heart surgery. She then mentioned, "okay, and he is deceased." It felt like she had just slapped me. She kept on asking questions about his medical history. I don't blame her, I can't blame her in fact. It's her job. She must deal with grieving families all the time. We were just one of many. But that was my grandpa.

ANNALIESE

They always have the game show network playing. I hate that. You walk in the community room and are met with people rounded up into a space to act optimistic and ridiculous. They all have this crazy hope for money and fame and the host is just pushing and jeering them along. I watch the screen for a couple minutes in this daze until I realize where I'm at again. Who I am. The game show network is too optimistic for a hospital for people like me. It's meant for people like Jennifer who had this hope in mind. It's like I'm stuck in a place that is forcing me to get better, but I still wake up with no motivation to do anything with the day, let alone myself. I try to remember the last time I've brushed my hair, but the days get lost now. Almost as lost as I've been for years, and I wonder if I can find it. You know the light or whatever. Find that hope so that when people ask me what I want to do in the future or if I'm getting better I don't just

see darkness in my mind. I want there to be a fucking flicker. You know some kind of hope. I want to wake up and not feel like I'm drowning in the presence of open air. I want to be better.

COTTON

I mean, it's good that she went home. Isn't that when you heal? I think that about my great grandmother. After she got diagnosed with Alzheimer's . . . I watched her kind of, just . . . wither away . . . over the course of a couple years. After a few years with it, she stopped seeing me as her great grandson, and started thinking I was her grandson, Mark. So that became my identity. She got moved into a home fairly close to my house, which I thought was awesome, because . . . if she had a chance to see me more, maybe she would be able to remember me? People don't tend to think of senior care facilities as hospitals, and after watching her rot in there I don't think I do either. The place was in such poor condition – she couldn't get comfortable because the air conditioning rarely worked, and was constantly swatting at flies. I got the idea, while I was cleaning out her house, I saw these old yellow suede chairs that she used to sit in in the '70s. I thought, if I brought them to her, she might feel more at home, so I got the chair and carted it to the home and up to her room. I helped her out of bed, and into the chair. I hadn't seen her that happy in years. After a while, she didn't have the strength to get out of bed, so the last time I remember helping her to her chair, she motioned towards my face, and said, "I love you, Colton."

She died that day. At least, to me. Really, she lived like three more years, except that she hated men, so she screamed expletives at me every time I would enter the room. I can't help but think that if we had kept her in her home that she had lived in for

forty years, that maybe she wouldn't have faded away like that. Home is where the heart is, right? Well, home was her *soul*. And we took that from her.

(COUNSELOR/STEPHEN realizes the issue is that the participants need to figure out how to function as a group without Jennifer)

STEPHEN/COUNSELOR

Okay, it's clear Jennifer's absence has shifted the dynamic of our space. I've been leading these Processing groups for a long time, and what I know is there's been plenty of Jennifers. Some of you have been speaking here long enough to remember some of them, too. This room is always changing, participants coming and going, all with very different things to say. But a new group identity will grow again as we talk, the embers are here. And the fire will be stoked if we choose to listen. Then we grow.

Scene 12: Closing

(“My Dog’s Eyes” by Zammuto plays. The lights flash in a rapid-fire animated sequence. During the song, THE CAST assembles an installation made up of various props used throughout the show. These props represent the many different spaces and relationships to those spaces we developed and explored over the course of the production. When the song comes to an end, THE CAST takes places around the installation, and eventually asks the audience to join them.)

APPENDIX B

WRITING PROMPTS AND RESPONSES

Acknowledgements

Appreciation is extended to Shawn Baker, Andrea Baldwin, Adeline Ballard, Jake Beck, Jayme Carrico, Cotton Hensley, Liz King, Annaliese Ludecke, Stephen Maxon, Jose Rodriguez, Matthew Stewart, and Austin Swarts. All the writing prompts below were written in during the process of creating *Desire Lines* and are included with their permission.

Desire Lines writing prompt #1:

Tell me a story about a black box.

Preferred Due Date: Tuesday, December 19

Writing prompt guidelines/notes:

1. Tell this story in any way that you want (ex. a poem, long paragraph form, a recipe, a scene, a song, automatic writing, etc.) The only guideline is that your story should be substantive - i.e. not a single haiku or short paragraph. Dig deep.
2. This story isn't necessarily going to make it into the script – Don't worry just yet about writing a story that can be easily adapted to a stage.
3. Just as in auditions, we want you to make decisions regarding your response to this prompt yourself. If you have questions about the nature of this question (for example, "What *kind* of black box?"), we want *you* to be the one to answer them.
4. Feel free to write in teams, or speak to others. Sometimes bouncing your ideas off another person is the best way to get started.
5. If you feel that your story contains sensitive information, and don't yet want to share it with the entire group, this is fine – just don't "Reply to all." We want you to feel safe to tell the story you need to tell. If the group ends up deciding to use something from this writing prompts or any others of this nature, we can anonymize and alter details on a case-by-case basis.
6. Be bold. Be creative. Be fearless when you write.

(by Shawn Baker)

prompt 1: black box

I've performed in a beautiful black box theater, professional as hell. Curtains circling the whole space, allowing complete freedom for seating and riser placement. A tiled black floor, modular, with arrangeable electrical outlets, mirrored literally and in spirit by a full-spanning lighting grid made of black bars below a black ceiling. A sound system only revealed to performers so they can make sure to avoid it for fear of it breaking. Legit shit. And this beautiful, modern, malleable creative space was lovingly designed and crafted to be utterly wasted on high school students. The amount of barebones, low-effort work and otherwise shitty teen behavior that went on in that place is downright insulting. Even the kids who were in that room by choice and with honest vigor to do an extracurricular play didn't know how good they had it.

And it didn't fully sink home how lucky I was to be able to play in that space until I saw the GAB's "black box" over a decade later. It's an obviously repurposed classroom, literally broken and falling apart. Cramped, poorly lit, and inefficient to shuffle anyone in and out of. It's less nestled in a department than it is somehow simultaneously an imposing void that's impossible to find. And it smells. It doesn't, but shouldn't it though?

I'm going in hard on UNT's black box because while my high school's is a place designed to perfectly suit transcendent performances, it rarely if ever did. Yeah, kids and teachers and audience members would walk out of that space with fond memories of sometimes very good work, but that room rarely fostered wonderfully vibrant and undeniable creativity. It never became a space where work was conceived and born, over and over again, feeding on itself to where the sheer weight of its own undeniable history informs its present. That high school black box had scripts brought into it, a black hole. UNT's black box is a big bang, exploding forth creation over and over again. Maybe UNT's wasn't poorly made, maybe it's just well worn. This is where creative performers want to be. And were. And are.

What hyperbolic, romantic horse shit. But that's the way I wrote it.

Mister Happy's Secret Black Box

Mister Happy, a man after The Music Man's Harold Hill.

Thank you for coming, I'm Mister Happy, The Optimist. The Tone Setter, The Mood Shifter, The One Who Puts The Smile On Your Face. I help wash out the bullshit, that anger, the cynicism, built up from a hellish day and keep my family All Good.

My younger daughter will probably die in her 40s. That's what the statistics say.

And I can teach you too, backed by raw statistics! Yes, with my easy to emulate example, you too can be an atom bomb of aplomb, fusing bullshit into That Good Shit. (That's copyright me, do **not** steal it.)

She has cystic fibrosis, a genetic disorder that causes her body's relationship with salt to be stressed beyond counseling, necessitating divorce. The children of this bad marriage is thick mucus that will wear out her lungs. Lungs are not easy to come by. Not available ones.

Start simple. Keep those smiles going, why is no one smiling? Come on, lemme see those teeth. Yes, very good. You can't help but smile around someone exuding this much good spirit can you?

Breathing treatments and expensive drugs is what gets her beyond childhood into her 40s. We have insurance, we're lucky. But because we live in Hell World now, thousands of kids in less fortunate families live in a nightmare worse than ours. That's probably what makes me the most angry, most of the time. The next time she's in the hospital I'll be more mad about something else. About having a sick child, a shitty genetic lottery choosing her. About my wife and I both carrying this defective gene we didn't know about, but should have.

Yes, the key is broadcast a chill and happy disposition, an infectious form of foolishness, of clownery. Not too much, of course. You don't want to go overboard, then you look like an asshole. No, just be all good, dude. Look for an opportunity for a good one liner, a good pun. That's when you'll all have fun.

My wife and I have half-broken genes, that broke our daughter fully. Jesus, I gotta stop being melodramatic.

Be comedic! But also, be a good listener. A frustrated person, carrying the weight of the day, needs you to be an outlet, needs you to hear, to understand, to process, and give supportive comments. Even advice! You need to help your family unwind, release the shackles reality clamps to them. Only then can you replace those negative shackles, with the positive shackles of a hug of humor.

Kurt Vonnegut would say "so it goes". The cycle of life, the ubiquity of shitty circumstances and death, that affects everyone. We're all in the same boat. That's a good mantra. It's also a shitty thing to tell an otherwise normal kid who is adorable as hell. You have no idea how cute. A fucking ham, living an otherwise normal life. What a world. Oh, another mantra. I gotta reign this indulgent sappy shit in.

Indulge in some blue comedy with the spouse. You know, the kind of joke that crosses the line they pretend bothers them but they laugh anyway. Because you know your spouse, you know your family. You know the way to break them all out of whatever funk life has dropped them into, once again. Because life can be shitty, it tends to be, these days. But you can choose a different path. Choose a different atmosphere for your family to exist in within the safe space of your home.

I think about how to document her life, like an airplane's black box, but for an entire human being's self. Damn, that's fucking

depressing. And a bit condescending. She's a human being, not a multimedia project. Not some sort of viral video for the intranet of a family.

Family is a unit, its own entity. A body with its own interconnected systems functioning as a whole- don't you want all those bodily functions operating at peak performance? The brain, the liver, the stomach, the **lungs**, the blood. All of it happy and hoppin' and helping tell the world that the story of your family, your people, is a good one. One you could watch on ABC Thursday nights as a two-camera comedy, I've already gotten our pilot written if any of you are development executives, please talk to me after this presentation.

*My grandfather was a lawyer and a hell of a storyteller. I'm an audio producer. And my dumb ass didn't think to sit him down with his daily afternoon vodka to have him spin yarn into my tape recorder until he was too sick to do it. My daughter is a toddler, there's still time to do that for her. **With** her. It wouldn't be for **her**, would it?*

You do this **for** your family! You've been cast, your role is Mister Happy, and you keep the ship sailing smooth. There's no paycheck, no barter, no pension, no treasure chest, no pat on the back, other than the one you give yourself at the end of the day when your family goes to sleep happy and content. Because you defeated Negativity. You kicked Cynicism's ass, the right fucker. The prick. Only happiness in this house! Mint gold, with your help.

Or should she decide if she wants a black box. Shouldn't she decide how we all remember her? A production edited, produced, and directed by her. But really, isn't that also just, letting her live her life?

Because your job, is to help your family live their life. But happy.

(by Austin Swarts)

Prompt #1

Love Letter

Dearest Black Box,

You are a room full of mirrors.

The minimalism of your dress has allowed for such play and projection.

Just as music is conjured out of the invisible, so we summon entire epics and ambitious abstracts out of your dark canvas.

Some might see your monotone glory as boundaries-- as a box!

We assure you, our Love, we witness the endless expanse of the cosmos when we gaze into your velvety abyss.

There is something indefinably pure about your space.

If galleries were stripped of their pretentious presentations, we would uncover your uncorrupted, ever-fresh, inexhaustible mystery.

We also find in you the feminine. Her grace.

You are a womb, perfectly receptive.

The river of time has delivered us on new soil. We carried a seed then. We have cultivated and nourished our garden. And, if the season is right, we would truly delight in sharing the fruits and flowers from our bountiful harvest.

Keep safe, healthy, and happy.

See you soon!

~All our love,

The Cast

(by Matthew Stewart)

"There's always a moment when you start to fall out of love, whether it's with a person or an idea or a cause, even if it's one you only narrate to yourself years after the event: a tiny thing, a wrong word, a false note, which means that things can never be quite the same again. For me it was hearing a stand-up comedian make the following observation: "These scientists, eh? They're so stupid! You know those black-box flight recorders they put on aeroplanes? And you know they're meant to be indestructible?"

It darkened my doorstep
A black box
Drowning in sun,
Starving for the light around it.
Like a magnet feigning for its polar
Opposite.
It let itself in

It pissed on my carpet.
I wasn't allowed to return it
Who would send back something "SO. CUTE?!"
And they didn't know who sent it so I would have to leave. Please.
I swear it looked me right in the face
I could feel it challenging my authority.

It threw a house party?
I wasn't on the list, but I guess you could come in
"The party IS bumpin'"
Knuckin' AND Buckin'
Guys cheered for the box because it reminded them of their fathers
Girls flocked to the box because it reminded them of their fathers
I spent the night throwing up
The box held my hair back

"It's always the thing that doesn't get smashed? So why don't they make the planes out of the same stuff?" The audience roared with laughter at how stupid scientists were, couldn't think their way out of a paper bag, but I sat feeling uncomfortable. Was I just being pedantic to feel that the joke didn't really work because flight recorders are made out of titanium and that if you made planes out of titanium rather than aluminium, they'd be far too heavy to get off the ground in the first place? I began to pick away at the joke. Supposing Eric Morecambe had said it? Would it be funny then? Well, not quite, because that would have relied on the audience seeing that Eric was being dumb—in other words, they would have had to know as a matter of common knowledge about the relative weights of titanium and aluminium."

The box called for a house meeting.
There were two of us.
I wasn't doing enough for myself
When's the last time you were happy,
No. Not when something made you happy.
When you felt it.
Spontaneously
Without prodding

It unfurled.
suppressed anamnesis;
Sense memories-
Music you bond to souls,
Redolent time,
Things people had forgotten.
Wanted to forget.

To shift and persist

It wept.

I wouldn't-

won't-

can't.

"House meeting. Five minutes.

Pack your shit."

"There was no way of deconstructing the joke (if you think this is obsessive behaviour, you should try living with it) that didn't rely on the teller and the audience complacently conspiring together to jeer at someone who knew more than they did. It sent a chill down my spine, and still does"

It sends me emojis

So many emojis

"You [clap emoji] need [clap emoji] to [clap emoji] remember [clap emoji]

"[Eggplant emoji]– [Peach emoji] – [sweat droplet emoji]"

I don't think that last one was for me.

I don't answer.

It's crashing on couches

Reminding people they forgot-

Vindicating,

Stoking embers

That

Makes me happy.

(by Jake Beck)

Desire Lines Writing Prompt 1

When I think about a specific story about the black box, it was during, “Shall we Play a Game?” and I remember getting full access to the space for the first time ever in my Master’s program. I was both elated and terrified that I would have the space all to my own, save for my co-director Jo Lugo. I remember my first day of rehearsal in there. I had a few scenes completely written and a couple of others that were only partially finished. I was living in a small one-bedroom apartment and making rehearsal space was difficult. I only really had about a fraction of open space as I did in the Black Box.

That first rehearsal I was constantly working through the space in every possible way. I hadn’t had unlimited access like this to a rehearsal space up to that point in my life. I always had to make do with a small bedroom, limited timed rehearsals in either in the Kleinau theatre or room 2012 back at SIU, so this was the first time I really got a chance to just play around in a space. I felt completely free to do whatever I needed to do.

I remember clearly reading over portions of the incomplete script from various spots on the stage space. It was fascinating to be this close to this audience while knowing that we would have lights and other forms of tech. The separation between audience and myself was so thin that it was basically transparent. I had performed in various other theatres like Sauk Valley Community College’s Jerry Weston Mattis Theatre and The Marion Kleinau Theatre at SIU, but the Black Box was so much more intimate. It almost felt like the space was designed to not allow a fourth wall to exist. I remember sitting in different spots in the audience to check sight lines, but realized that there wasn’t much difference between the far back corner and the front; you were right there in front of everyone.

I think realizing that the space was so intimate really shaped my show more than anything. Of course every time I have done a show I have all these big and grand plans, but eventually those huge plans get whittled down into smaller, more manageable, and more importantly more executable performance choices. I remember for, “Shall we Play a game?” that I wanted to have multiple TVs with videogame systems hooked up to them, but I realized I didn’t have the time or

the money to get all of the equipment. Instead I settled on the one Tv and videogame system. But I placed it dead center up stage, so it was viewable to everyone. But Those little moments of recognizing the intimacy of this space, even for just a solo show was a huge deal. I think working in that space with my first big solo performance really shaped how I would create performances in the future. Most of my techniques and general knowledge about performance, and performing in Poor Theatre situations came from Sauk and SIU, but really putting those performance techniques to work were refined and honed within that Black Box. Working on my first major solo show in such a small space meant I personally could drop any pretension of theatricality and just engage with the audience directly. Even with the lights on I could still make out faces and bodies and see to the back wall; There is no hiding in the Black box, that's definitely something I learned.

Working in that space my very first day of rehearsal for "Shall We Play a game?" was a disorientation/reorientation moment because during the initially writing of the show I kept picturing spaces like the Kleinau or Sauk and not the Black Box. As I moved through that first rehearsal I began to test to see how the space reacted to my movements and the sound of my voice. I wouldn't have a problem filling the space vocally at all. As old concerns from past theatre receded, new problems arose. There was no back stage, and I decided that trying to make one with flats would limit my performance space and make the space feel awkward and even more compressed. So I did away with any fourth wall nonsense and just focused on making the performance and succinct and polished as possible. I would end up spending many nights in that space working either by myself or with Jo and figuring out what worked and what didn't work. Working in the Black Box forced me to be more malleable as a performer in ways I was already prepared for because of past theatre experiences, but this was the first time I actually got a chance to put those skills to the test. The Black box is an intimate space that requires finesse and a good knowledge of space in order to get to know it and know what works and what doesn't.

(by Liz King)

According to America's most reliable source, Wikipedia, "In science, computing, and engineering, a **black box** is a device, system or object which can be viewed in terms of its inputs and outputs without any knowledge of its internal workings."

When we do get to inspect and poke the inner workings of a system, we call the device a white box. But who the hell cares about those?

I'm telling you about the black box theory because of blackboxing. It's a social phenomenon where something's work is made invisible by its accomplishments. "When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become (Latour, Bruno)."

I'm telling you about Blackboxing because it never applied to me and don't you just love looking at that greener grass.

I am the owner and operator of this black box.

Yeah, she started giving me trouble about 11 years back. The lights were always flickering but eventually they just started going all wrong. They'd go out and I'd walk around in the dark for days. Then they'd turn back on and I'm being followed by a pink spotlight or just standing there awash in a blue glow. It was hard to keep the place running with lights like these.

So I had the place looked at and they said, they swore, there's no pink spotlight following me. But if I see, if my eyes burn from the brightness, if I feel the heat on my back, does it matter if it was really there?

Anyway, they've been here ever since, digging around everything. They've torn up the floorboards- I think Tony is still down there, they've listened to the walls with glass cups, they've talked about electrocuting it, they've been feeding it everything all to get these damn lights to behave for me. And for the most part they do, but for the most part, this maintenance gets in the way of...all things.

I see the lights reflect on the precious mundane. Scrubbing extra hard to remove the waterproof mascara. The new layer of dust on the novel I was reading.

(by Jayme Carrico)

I don't consider myself materialistic, but I like things. I tend to tie memories to things. They are not usually very big. I also like to organize, so I usually put things in boxes.

My freshman year at UNT I lived in a dorm, and I walked around campus a lot. I would pick up things I found on the ground and save them in a black box under my bed. Some of the things I found: one silver earring (it didn't belong to anyone in the area, I checked), a cool rock, some coins, two broken key chains, a fluffy thing that I think fell off someone's purse. I still have the box somewhere.

I have a ring in a small black ring box. My grandfather gave it to me when I was about twelve. The ring is too small for me now. It's a pretty ring. He passed away last year. Sometimes I take it out and look at it.

I have a black display box on my shelf. It has my Chi Omega pin in it (my sorority pin). Both my great aunt (my dad's aunt) and my aunt (my mom's sister) were Chi Omegas at UNT. I honestly did not really enjoy much of my time there. However, I am glad I did it. I met some very interesting people, and it's a great networking source. When I look at it I think how three generations of women in my family (both sides) share this tradition.

(by Cotton Hensley)

1.) The first black box in my mind is the automatic font black box in Microsoft word. I often rely on that box to keep my thoughts uniform and strictly formatted. I've never been artistically gifted in an aesthetic sense. I've always envied those who could paint or draw because I often stick to the rules of traditional formatting: black font. Even when tasked with a prompt like this I struggle with creative thoughts or how I could make something look aesthetically pleasing because it's engrained in me to keep everything uniform and neat. That black box looks me in the eye every time I even think of color-coding some notes. The words next to it say "default". As if black is the appropriate way to write your thoughts or feelings. This makes me think about how I was taught to write in my earliest English classes. I would fail simple writing assignments because I just didn't follow the "rules" of creative writing. I eventually graded my own students on the same formatting mistakes. So, this black box is a constant reminder that I not only had my own writing ability stifled, but I recycled the same inhibitors on other creative writers. I just feel like my own content suffers because of the structures in place and I can't fix it. Even when writing notes, I found myself subconsciously adjusting the font to black in 12-point font to just make it look "correct". I feel confined by this box and I'm too afraid to step out of it.

2.) I was awarded "Distinguished Staff" back when I worked for UNT Housing, but I have no idea what that means. The award came in this small wooden, surprisingly heaving box that had a long slinging flap that unveiled the award. Inside this box is a bunch of microfiber that's soft to touch and serves its own purpose to clean the award. I should mention I lost the award. I have no idea where I left it because it was just this boring glass thing that someone gave me for working in the department for too long. The box, however, is still on my night stand. I keep my honor pins, buffalo nickels, rings, and pictures in this kind little box. The microfibers keep the dust off my precious belongings and protects them from strangers with wandering eyes. If someone would walk in my room they'd see the awards, the books, and the movies lined on my shelves. They wouldn't see this box because it doesn't appeal to them like it does to me and the items within the box are the same.

(by Annaliese Ludecke)

Desired lines prompt 1:

Let me take you back to a memory. It,s 3rd grade and I was having trouble going to bed. So to help me sleep, I would move into the living room where my dad would be, and fall asleep to the sounds of him snoring. I think that just having another presence there brought a sense of ease to my bones. So with the silent mumbles of the television disguising the padding of my feet on the tile floor, I tip toed into the living room and contorted my body into a comfortable position on the love seat, by my fathers recliner.

~Side Note: As bad as my sleeping habits are, my dads are about ten times worse.~

It did not startle me that he awoke about 10 minutes after my arrival. I laid motionless and attempted to hide the fact that I was awake. He seemed indifferent to me in that moment though. He just got up from the recliner and made his way outside. When I heard the closing click of the front door I jutted my eyes open. Feeling a sudden sense of longing and curiosity towards my dads disappearance, I got up to peer out the window. As I gazed into the front yard of our house, I witnessed something that will forever be ingrained within my mind. My eyes fell upon my dad, crying into his hands. I could feel the sobs and the wails of insecurity in every part of me . Suddenly, in that moment, my heart longed to comfort and try to understand this man that no longer resembled the image of my father that I had previously known. This man was vulnerable and distraught. This man was caught between reality and a desire for something unreal. This man was a stranger. Then this stranger balled his fist and punched the stone wall of our house. He put all his energy, frustration, and fears into a section of our home and- nothing. The stones remained in place. The wall stood just as strong, and the only thing broken was my father. He looked keenly at his hand, and then the tears stopped. His face fell even more, and what I witnessed was the equivalent to what I believe a loss of hope looks like. His eyes met the wall then strode back to the bloody knuckles on his hand one last time before he began to walk back into the house. Startled and suddenly aware of my presence in the moment, I ran back to the couch to pretend to be asleep once more. As I lied there trying to settle my breathing, I awaited the sound of him lying back down on the recliner and the beginning of his snores again. They didn't come. Instead I felt a hand on my head. A strong and what I assumed to be bloodied hand caressing my hair back. testing my limits, and taking my chance on him knowing I was awake, I opened my eyes to see his face. He was staring at the ground with nothing but a blank undertone and a solitary tear streaming down his cheek. This was the moment. The moment that I found myself. The moment I knew, without a doubt that I loved and desired to

know the depths, and pains, and stories, and realities of others. This moment created who I am, and this moment was one of the bleakest, but most telling moments of my life.

(by Stephen Maxon)

My brother was a very famous actor. I don't like to bring it up, because no one *really* is impressed by someone's proximity to a famous person. It's like, it's fun to talk about at parties, but does it make me any better? Does being close to greatness actually mean that I might be great too? Last time I checked, the only things that happens the closer you get to the sun is that you're more likely to get burnt.

...

Anyways, yes, he was a pretty famous actor. This I feel comfortable asserting, among his myths and tall tales and exaggerations. He didn't find a lot of work, but his big break was big-and it broke him ((we'll get to that later)). He worked hard in high school, doing tech work on shows his freshman and sophomore years and running sound and all that, until the first day of his junior year, when, and I'm gonna quote him directly, as he told it to me, "the head of the theatre program took one look at me, and said 'kid, you've got a presence like the Holy Spirit,' and cast me as Richard in Richard III." The acting bug bit him pretty bad after that, and he made his way into Yale School of Drama ((class of 1960, he will never forget to tell you)), honing his chops as an actor, and becoming just altogether too charismatic, if you ask me. If his stage presence was like the Holy Spirit before, he was as big as the stage now. He could fill up a room like smoke, as unsubstantial as he was...big. That's it. He was big. No hyperbole, he would love that too much. He was just big. His footsteps in the boots for his costume rang out like gunshots on stage, and honestly, sometimes they hit me like gunshots too. Sometimes they still do.

After bumming around New Haven for another year, he packed up all his things and moved to Los Angeles. He passed a spell in Haight-Ashbury in 1965, two years before the Summer of Love, and he tells me the weed was a million times better before the hippies all got there. I doubt him, but you know how he was about his stories-well, maybe you don't. He claims he became good friends with Dennis Hopper, but Dennis never showed up to his funeral, so really, how good friends were they? My brother got some bit parts in various commercials, TV shows, a couple non-speaking parts in movie, you know, but then he met Stanley. Kubrick. They ended up at a Captain Beefheart show at the Whiskey-A-Go-Go in the '66, and Kubrick drunkenly asked my brother if he was Captain Beefheart five or six times, before Kubrick muttered "Well you should be" and invited him to audition for a part in his new sci-fi movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

He arrived on set in August of that year, and he and Stanley sat down and talked for seven hours non-stop, without a role in mind, to figure out how Stanley could use my brother in his movie. The director, like everyone my brother met, was drawn to his gravitas, which encompassed more than height ((he was very, very tall)), or words, or anything. It was just him-in his totality. And Stanley knew this, and wanted to use his totality, his seeming boundlessness, in this movie, a movie about space and the limits of human understanding and imagination. And there he had it-my brother wouldn't play a human, not a villain, not a hero, not anything. He would play a pure presence. And so, he was cast as the Monolith. They would build this tall, black rectangle, sleek and mysterious, and he would stand inside of it, for the duration of the scene, and that was his entire role. But he made the movie. He

really did. His sudden appearances ((it feels strange to put gender onto the Monolith, but, for me, his energy pulses out of the boxes)) bracket the movie, ensnaring the audience in the “Dawn of Man” segment as much as the primates in his presence, fascinating the astronauts later, and comforting ((in his own strange way)) the astronaut at the very end. The black box before he stepped in was just painted black wood, but when my brother entered, the crew hushed. If Kubrick commanded the set, he seemed to be receiving his orders from that Monolith.

My brother’s scenes were finished within a month. He never once complained about standing inside the box for six, eight hours a day. But it changed him. I know. In that box, he saw infinity. He saw limits fall away like leaves in the autumn. For him, the outer shape of the box didn’t matter, just like in the movie. The Monoliths were not imposing because they were black rectangles on the outside; they were imposing because of their incredible potentiality, the fact that no one knew what was inside, that there was even a chance they could be bigger on the inside than out. And inside, he saw everything, all at once, stretching forward endlessly, but curling upon itself-the universe, in its cycles and newness and oldness and birth and death, the total ability to bracket life, to give it a beginning and an end, to frame beauty and experience in ways that even a person, gazing up at the stars and the inky void, trying to see oneself reflected back, could understand.

He stopped acting after that. The returns from *2001* set him up well enough for the future, and Stan ((my brother called Stanley ‘Stan,’ since they became very good friends during the film and talked almost every day until my brother died)) gave him some money

every month too. He never said why he quit, but just kind of smiled and said he could go back if he wanted, and that he got almost everything he needed from being in *2001*. After he died, we buried him in that black rectangle just like he wanted and I know just what he knew when he requested it. In there, away from eyes or the sun or rain or memory, he could live forever.

A5 Saturday, November 18, 1983

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Ezra McElroy, 44, The Presence Behind The Monolith, Is Dead

By Bruce Wallace

Stanley Kubrick once remarked, "without Ned McElroy, *2001* would have just been a very long movie about a very long trip." Mr. McElroy's role as the imposing Monolith in Mr. Kubrick's magnum opus *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which Mr. McElroy famously requested left out of the credits for reasons unknown, towers, both literally and metaphorically, over the movie. His breakout role, which consisted of standing inside a black rectangle for several hours a day during filming, remains iconic both within the film and in film history.

While crossing a street in downtown Los Angeles on the night of November 17th, he was struck by a powder blue Dodge Aspen. He died almost instantly upon impact, his brother Jackson confirms, at the age of forty-four, and his body was sent back home to Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, where he was born. Per his wishes, instead of a traditional casket, he was buried in a black rectangle and interred near his extended family.

He demonstrated an aptitude for acting at an early age, where, to quote Mr. McElroy from a rare interview, "the head of the theatre program passed by me and

turned around, and kept walking, and turned around again, and said 'Have you acted?' and I said 'No,' and he said, 'well you walk around like a damn electric storm in a 16 year old's body, how would you like to be Hamlet for this year's play?' and I almost had to scrape my jaw off the floor." From there, he worked diligently, and earned a spot in the Yale School of Drama's Class of 1960, with professors and teachers describing him in glowing terms, with one noting that he "commanded the stage as if he were a drill sergeant and this was boot camp." After moving out to California shortly thereafter, a chance meeting with Mr. Kubrick at a Captain Beefheart show led to his being cast in *2001*. The month-long shooting seemed to impact him greatly, and with his earnings he purchased a house and almost completely retired from acting. He spent his considerable free time (supported by his own earnings from the movie and Mr. Kubrick's generosity) birding, hiking, and practicing yoga.

Mr. McElroy once remarked that he got everything he ever wanted from acting out of that role. "What else is there to play? In the Monolith, I could play everything and anything, I was kind of like that cat from that one math thing, maybe Schmidt's Cat? I don't remember, physics isn't really my bag. But inside there, it was less about me, it was about everything outside of me, surrounding me, what I could do as an actor, outside myself. And that's what acting is about, right? Not being yourself."

(by Jose Rodriguez)

A Short Autobiography

Hello, my name is Jose ■■■ Rodriguez. My name was supposed to be Joe Louie. My mother did not know how to spell that, so she want with my current name. I was born September 27th, 1994 in San Antonio Texas. Out of six kids, I am the fifth born. I have four older brothers, and a younger sister.

My mother is Yolanda, and my birth father Jaime. However, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I did not grow up with him, but I had a different dad. His name was Jose, and he is that dad I know. He was out of town a lot for work though, so my mother kind of raised us by herself.

I cannot remember a lot of my childhood. It's all one black blur. The parts I do remember are not the most pleasant though. Growing up, I was called Lulu, a nickname my cousin gave me. It became so commonplace that a lot of family forgot my actual name. It was a lot of debate growing up, because people told me Lulu was a girl's name and I'd argue since that was my name.

Early Childhood:

When I was upset, I didn't want to be around people. I'd often find places to hide. I enjoyed these secluded spots I would go to. Sometimes it was under my bed, other times it was a group of trees in a field that I would find. It felt like a clubhouse. I'd sit there for hours just staring off into space or reading a book. This became problematic as my family thought I went missing.

I had a lisp up until third grade. The more I look back the more evident it becomes I was always a queer person. I would attend speech therapy for my problem. It wasn't until my speech therapist said she would turn into a bird, and peck me every time it happened that it finally stopped. Strange tactic, but it worked out well for the most part.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I didn't understand it than, but I do now. I only faintly remember it, but I mostly remember how upset my dad was.

Another pivotal moment around this time was when my favorite color was pink. It's harmless enough. A little boy who likes pink. However, I had an uncle who felt the need to ridicule me. I didn't understand what he was saying, but knew he was making fun of me for liking pink. Since that moment, I've hated pink. I wear it a lot to spite him. A lot of who I am is to spite others.

Middle School:

The worst part was, to fill the void of my friend, I started using dating apps. It put me in a lot of situations which I'm open about, but none of them good.

Now, I have decided to completely give up the illusion that I'm trying to go back to school. I was lying to myself.

I am 23 now, and the past two years have made it feel like I've been alive a lot longer. ■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■

Desire Lines writing prompt #2:

Verbal Map

This is a “free writing/stream of consciousness” exercise, but unlike true automatic writing, you will attempt to focus your mind on the subject below. Do not over think, and do not second guess. *First Thought/Best Thought*. Here are the rules.

1. Get out the timer on your smartphone, laptop, etc. You will need it for this.
2. Set your “writing space” up...do whatever you need to do to allow yourself some undisturbed writing time. (i.e. find a closed space, get a coffee/tea, be on social media for a while) whatever you do to prepare to be focused.
3. Once you are fully set, **make a list of every step you just took to create a space that favorably facilitates your writing this assignment. You need to provide this list with your writing responses.**
4. You are not allowed to use the internet for any reason for this assignment after this moment.
5. Think of a space that means a great deal to you. This could mean anything – it could mean the space you’re in as you write, your home, a family member or friend’s home, your work space, a church, a park, a train station, a mine, a bar, a venue, etc.
6. Take a Deep breath. Set the timer for 15 minutes. Then press start.
7. Write nonstop for 15 minutes on the following prompt:
8. Verbal Map – Explain how the space from Step 5 is “laid out” to someone who has never been there. Explain how one might arrive there. Explain what factors of the space (people, sounds, sights, feels, etc.) make it what it is to you. Give this hypothetical someone names of applicable roads, signs, nicknames, and what to do with them. Use landmarks or distinctive features and give your ‘expert advice’ on the subject – who lives in/works in/inhabits this space? Where should they go? How is the space *meant* to be used, and how do *you* use it? Where should they avoid, and why?
9. Once the timer goes off, do not run spell check, do not proof, send it back with your list of writing steps.
10. This activity can be repeated throughout the writing process for *Desire Lines* using any prompt (or variation of this prompt) that you feel would help you/the production. You may absolutely submit multiple attempts at this activity.

(by Stephen Maxon)

1. Took the blanket and cloths out of my desk chair so I could sit down.
2. Moved my various desk clutter away so I have a clear place on either side of the keyboard (though not necessarily behind it).
3. Put on music; band and genre not important.
4. Read a little bit about the band I ended up on, La Femme. They had to go to tour the USA in order to trick the French music industry (who previously barely gave any notice to the band) into thinking that they were hot shit who could sell out America (they had 20 very small gigs in America-very cold shit). They were signed upon their return and are doing very fine now.
5. Read the prompt several times.

Here we are, at 219 Jagoe St. Here we are at the part of the duplex closest to the driveway.

Directly inside, there is a green upholstered chair. Sometimes, I would sit here, while my best friend Kurt would lay on the couch, and sometimes vice-versa. The print on the couch can best be described as “out-of-focus grandparent.” It is a halfway futon, not completely couch and not completely bed, and Kurt and I would snuggle here frequently. It is equally homey with the overhead light on or off. It is equally homey with Kurt’s former (then current) partner there, but I think I liked having Kurt all to myself, so while I appreciated Guinn’s warmth, I preferred being there with just Kurt (which happened frequently, as Guinn worked nights). The room on the left is the meditation room-a valuable room, but at that point, too holy, or seemingly holy to me. Not many things are truly intrinsically holy, though. Most things are made of wood or metal, which don’t often come from Heaven. It is a fine room to go into, but if you are looking for

warmth or self-actualization, the living room is better, or even better, the bed. Kurt and I would snuggle up in here and lay our hearts out like drying clothes for each other, asking the other to ring out the soap and water. The comforter is very warm. The whole house is still warm, even though the heater didn't often work very well. The kitchen is fine and dandy, with a great lamp light that really makes it feel cozy. The whole place is cozy. It is full of soft edges and like walking in a pillow. It is a little blurry, however, as much as that word can apply to a description of a place and not a vision. The hours melt. This is welcome and good. This is not a place to bop in and out of, not a launchpad for adventures to the bars or to elsewhere. Everything is here. What more could you need? There is love and warmth and kindness. I just stood up to check my phone and lost around twenty seconds. There is very little space to walk around in in the house. This helps it feel cozy too, like a turtle's shell, or a womb. It was an escape. Not anymore, since Kurt moved. Even outside is cozy, however, mostly because it is limited to the backyard or the front porch, where one can see everything, be of the world without being in it. This is the key to warmth, is to be far from the world and be far from what it can do to you. In 219, nothing can reach out. There are trees to the right (if one is looking out from the porch) that block one off from the daycare next door, although it does not block the sounds. The outer wall of the bedroom is on the left. It is a cave by design, except with less rock and wet parts and no fires necessary inside. Here is your big chance to grow.

(by Cotton Hensley)

1. Set up in living room of apartment
2. Turn on computer
3. Open word
4. Turn on ambient playlist from spotify
5. Put on closed back headphones
6. Get up from chair.
7. Make coffee while listening
8. Grab snack and put on coffee table next to chair and computer
9. Pace room
10. Turn off lights and TV
11. Set phone on do not disturb
12. Put on hat or anything that blinds my sight to only the computer
13. Sit and listen
14. Sit up straight
15. Turn off wifi
16. Go

You're driving along highway 84 in a straight line for 8 miles from my home. You see a wall of trees while you drive. Everything you see is focused on a light. You approach the light at the intersection of highway 84 and a road simply named "Base Road". Take a right on base road and cross the train tracks. As you go down this road you are met with a gate that has no guard. The "gate" is always open. This is an old army depot that has a public golf course on it. At the end of Base road you must take a right. If you continue to go straight you will only be driving on gravel, which leads to a forest of pine trees. You take a right into the parking lot of Oak Grove Country Club. It was an old army pasture used for testing ammunition, but it's now an 18 hole golf course in terrible condition. It looks like it's still a pasture but with a couple of holes for golfing. My favorite space is this six mile stretch of golf course. If you stand on the mound of the first tee (imagine a patch of ground that is lifted five feet above it's surrounding) you can overlook the first hole. In front of you about 40 yards is a small creek. As you look up you see an alley in between a wall of trees. Nothing but trees. If you were golfing you would have to hit it straight down the fairway without getting in these trees. You're walking across a bridge over the creek down the alley way of trees. Among the horizon you see the army depot in disrepair and highway 84. You're at the end of the hole. If you look to the left there's hole 2. Just past hole two is a small neighborhood for low income families. A tall fence separates them from the golf course. The fence is at least ten feet high. It's chainlink. My friends live there. They would walk alongside the fence with me as I played. Sometimes I would stop playing and we would look for golf balls together. That's how I remember the space. The golf course was an old run down area that nobody played. I rarely saw anyone there. I would just walk, play, and be alone. Until I got to hole two I was alone with my thoughts. If I saw my friends on hole two I could just hang out in the trees with them. We would look for golf balls to sell, sometimes find snakes, and chase squirrels. When I got older my friends moved away to another neighborhood. I just kept playing. The space became an area of thought. Just thought. I would play for hours on end. Freedom from the age of 9 to 19. I didn't have to be home. I could just be at the course. Sometimes I wouldn't even play. Just walk. My favorite days were just looking in the forests for golf balls because they sold for .50 cents a ball at the country club. I had a burlap sack I would carry around while I dug through the trees. Playing golf was only part of it. My favorite hole had a tree right in the middle of the "alley", going up a steep hill. You could try to go over the tree or simply hit short of it to come up with a better plan. I

would always try to go over it. I often failed and had to find the ball in the forest. Imagine standing in this alley of a forest and you're approaching a 50 foot pine. The only pine in between the alley. The one planted by man to make a game harder. When you walk past this tree and up the hill you are overlooking a small pond. If you happened to hit your ball passed the tree, you would go in the pond. I love this hole because it's in your best interest to hit the tree.

(by Jose Rodriguez)

Hey Jesse,

Didn't have a word document or way to put this in so it's all manual through texting

1. Had to convince my family to not force me on an hour long drive to visit my Aunt's farm.
2. Had to wait for my family to leave to said farm.
3. Had to use the restroom.
4. Layed down on the floor bed I am currently sleeping on.
5. Had to get back up, and grab my headphones I forgot.
6. Walk into the room my siblings sleep in, and grab my headphones out of my monster feet slippers.
7. Walk back out to the living room where my floor bed is, and lay down again.
8. Plug in my headphones, and pick my music.
9. Turn on my phone timer.
10. Do a split screen of my texting app, and my email app to have the prompt up to read as I type.
11. Start timer.

Okay, so from my house on Carlton street, you hop in the car. Drive south to a street that starts with M, and take a left to get to university. Then take another left to get on to university and drive towards the highway. Stay in the left lane. Keep driving past three stop lights. Take a left, under the bridge, at the fourth stop light. Go straight and merge on to the highway. Drive until the exit for fort worth comes up, and take that exit. This should be i35 south. Now, hit that gas peddle and go 85 until tragic slows you down. Stay in the middle lanes, or else you will have to exit and get lost for 15 minutes. That's not fun. Drive though fort worth. Keep driving. The drive is about 3 hours now of going straight down i35. Drive through Hillsboro. Enjoy the grassy knolls as they roll by. Drive through Waco and think about Baylor and the fucked up thing the coach let happen. Slow down in temple because traffic starts to build up. Look at all the terrible construction. Man, fuck this town. After you exit temple, you see the signs for Austin. You're closer. Keep driving. Before entering Austin, there is an exit on a couple of overpasses, on the left side of the road a Twin Peaks comes up, and that's your cue to take this exit. Go up the ramp, and take the next left. Drive straight past. Down go too fast cause the turn pops up. After about a mile the turn to an apartment complex comes up. Pull into it and turn right towards the gate. Wait for someone driving through to open the gate. Go in and drive to the last row of apartments from the wall at the end of the complex, and take a left. Drive to the last set of apartments before turn and find a parking space. Get off and go into the second building to the left. Walk up to the door on the first floor on the left. Knock, and wait for the familiar greeting your High School Friend Erik gives. The usual high pitched, "Josssseeeee! I missed you!" Deflect his show of love with a shitty side comment.

I ran out of time.

(by Shawn Baker)

Prompt #2

Prep

- The kids are asleep. This took 3 hours.
- Wife forgot I needed to write. I'll have to be efficient. To see her and to also get sleep. I haven't slept well in three weeks.
- I am in my studio, my safe space of microphones and equipment with lots of LED lights on them. I spent hours in the past pressing the buttons and twirling knobs until it didn't give me as much anxiety about it sounding right. It still doesn't sound right and still gives me some low-pulsing anxiety. Starting last week, a rhythmic clicking sequence has started repeating in my headphones every few minutes, which is not helping. The buddhists maintain their temples for eternity as a form of meditation. This room is that temple for me. The tinkering will never cease. There is a terrible, large table I made by slapping a 4x8 slab of particle board on a shitty desk with 8 gigantic clamps. It may break at any moment. Underneath the table, the worklight is on, a shitty fluorescent tube in a white housing I think I got from a radio station that was shutting down. I was assured I didn't steal it. I have no guilt if I did.
- Now YouTube for 15 minutes to help drown those thoughts.
- It maybe helped.
- I had to pee. I also got water. I think I'm getting sick. I need sleep. After.
-

The Thing

There is a space, that's more of a path. A found path. For me that space is near Madison Ave in The Colony, Texas, where I spent much of my adolescence. My first major childhood home. I'm 10? I dont know what age, it was 3rd and the first half of 4th grade at the end of it. The path starts at that house, and extends to a friend's house. I don't speak to that friend anymore, haven't in 20 years. That's fine. He's happy on Facebook, but I just realized I haven't seen any of his posts in like 5 years, I should check Facebook more, but I don't want to. The path by car to my friend's house involves a few miles. Get out of my neighborhood to the south, get to a main street, head west to the next obvious road to a nieghborhood. Take a right on that road, its your only option. I don't remember the name of his street, but if i'm with you i'll know it when i

see it. His house is on the left. You took a right onto his street, it was your only option. I'll know his house when I see it. I think. This path sucks, it required a parent. So i found my own path, on a bike. Here's that path. Head west on bike, enter the next street over's alley entrance, take a right, and go. You'll see undeveloped land to your left, you're in the border of your neighborhood. You didn't feel like you lived so close to such a border, but here it is, and you already feel like you're on your own. Eventually the alley kicks you out, into another neighborhood. It's beautiful that such an easy shortcut to somewhere else is just right there, all over, in every town. You could surely find this shortcut with a car, it's an alleyway. If i never found this path myself, i'd have discovered it in a car as a teenager i'm sure. But that's the point, i found it. No maps. We're in the way bottom of my friend's neighborhood, it's like ten rows of streets, laid out boringly, in his neighborhood. Can you call it a neighborhood when there's a zero chance in hell that his family knows anyone that lives this far south in it? These are strangers, and i'm trespassing. Not really, it's public roads, but when you're in an alley it's something less than public. I could get hit by a car. My mother's worries. I haven't gotten hit by a car, and i take this path all the time. It will be a few years until i have an accident on a bike. It will be fifteen feet from my house in the street, no one else around. My front tire will somehow spin 90 degrees and i will be over the handlebars before i know what's happening. My arm will be bleeding, my knee will be angry, and i will walk that bike, a different bike, all the way to middle school. It will be fine that i'm late, because i look like hell. But that's a different town, with different vibes, taking the paths i have to take that are the right ones to take. Now i'm around 10 and i have to find another leg of a shortcut to avoid having to bike down to where the cars go. So i take another alley, on the east border of his, my friend's, neighborhood. It's easy. I don't remember what any of it looks like, but it's my secret. When i get to his street, i pop out of the alley in the culdesac at the east end. There are very pretty houses here, the way they're manicured. I can't tell you specifics, but it's very nice to be here. It's because it, a culdesac with nice big trees and foliage, surrounds you nearly completely. And because you're almost to your

friend's house, you can see it right there. And now you're there. I'll have to point the house out to you, if i remember how it feels to look at the right one. I didn't have time to think my usual thoughts as i took this journey, i was too busy telling you how to get there. The thoughts are the most important part of this path, it's what makes it a space instead of a path through some place. You're a kid, you're on your own, in a space you created. There are other people here sometimes, kids playing in the open fields on the outskirts of a neighborhood, adults doing whatever the hell they do. You never interact. You each have something to do.

(by Austin Swarts)

fkajfl flip fla flab flan. keep the key smoving. okay. Space. Been thinkn about space a lot as of late. I cam down to it meaing Here and Now. whats here and now? my interiority. sure. my body is sitting here. or there. or ant other place. but really, what consitutients change? not many. just like putting on a different film. still has bodies, movement, a scene... things, props. so b my boy jklsdoa body is like the median.. no, I don't; know the word I'm looking for. it's like the bridge. the exterior place and space, and then... to me at least, there's the interiority./ which is just as infinite. as the external comsmos, ever expanding time and space. I recently read about how, and finally understood, how space na time are expanding. and I was like, shit, that feels like interiority. like consciousness. dig that. but poetics and science don't ever seem to meet. or noe one I hear is talkng about it. okay. the body as the bridge, the gate, um.. yes. but not like black and white boundary, it's a gradient, a spectrum. and there's the interiority. the personal cosmos. individuated. I like that place best. I'm always there. but I get to have fun there when my bvody is chill and takin care of. when I mecditate. that means everyting is sagfe, I'm fed, work is done. cau... hm, but I guess I meditate w even while at work. haning ith the kids. it's a good vantage point. I suppose it could be ego or it could be I am truly beuddled befuddled how people e seem so identified and driven by external. I mean. exmpathsize. they can't change every circumstance. but I know kl LIFE is benevolent. and it wouldn't keep ya trapped, if yiu're really ready to get htre lesson and SEE. so you can change the internal space. the psyche. yeah. it's made of words, and images, and impressions, and feelings, and all this formless stuff that I JUST LOVE. the exertrenal... I am grateful and indebted to the external space. it gave me my opertating system... wowrds words, sounds and color, experiences, love, loss, paint, plhfioan pain pleasure. CONTRAST. pattern! but I really am in love with the interiority of consciousness. it's formless. as a child I called it Imagination. I'd get done with my school work in elementary, and if I didn't feel like drawing on my papaers, I would just zoooooop be in my imagination... aware of my body sitting at my little desk... but my mind, my being, was free. s I suppoaw suppose that;s been the challenge of aduly life. performing all these spaces and places... cause I gotta keep the body alive. I love the people. I love my relationships. but I can'tl ie. the formless feels I more like home. and it's overflowing. an inexhaustible mystery. eternal delight. I just don't get it. I suppose I'm lucky I've had a life that blessed me to be acquainted with internal space... not that it searate frojiocjhar separate from external... it really is a continuum. I guess it's lke quantyum physics. you fet t get to a certain level and it just breaks down in lgoog logical syllogh sl sylloigisms ... h,... hm... trippy. that must be what ya call the SUPER rational. when the loghic and illogical meet. space. who knows what the show will say. that' why the black box is a cool space. caue cause its like the interiority. the inner chamber. poetics poetics, songs, love... only indicate. the finget po finger pointing at the moon... I can't re... re... resc uh what s the word? reduce! reduce the formless into words (form!). it's absurd. but that's the space. how to desrciebe the topoghraphy of ones own being. topography. fuck I'm a sloppy typ[er. ut it's a fun game. never auto wrote really. maybe that one time on paper by hand. which still allows you to think nore. keys you just flow. I like the sounds of the type tipe type. breatheeeee... h,,, yeah. so you can't describe it. you can only indicate. like we can talk about swimming, you can watch me swim, you can write the thesis on se swimming, but unttyil you jump in the u damn water and DO IT m ya can't really

UNDERSTAND. I guess that's why there's so much false religion and media end narrative.s and narrative. (s)s)s (s). cause you can hide behind words. and pretend ya know. talk t talk is so fuckin cheap. cheep. the alwarm the alarm is about to go off me thinkgs. I'm cheating and looking t ath the clock in the bottom corner... stalling. stalling. space. space. what more to say? each exterior palce place adds to my vocabulary, which increases all the more horizons in the internal. but I feel it's not quite accuatet accurate.... precise to describe tyhem them as two SPACES. they are two places. if I undertstand that dude jesses read. cause place would be how it's laid out. the exterior is my nervous system input... body in th alarm!!! 😊

1. waited for Lauren to leave for yoga. I knew it would be night and I'd be home alone. good time for clear channels.
2. lit an incense
3. turned off bright lights
4. meditated for 15 minutes (with timer)
5. set timer on cellphone for 15 minutes

Austin, prompt #2

(by Annaliese Ludecke)

Desired lines prompt 2:

You will know this place solely on the emptiness. In west Texas the nothingness seems to be a common theme, but Marfa understood it better than any other town. People usually come for the lights. I came to feel something. Everything is covered in silence, and even the hushed tones of breath seem like too much for the space. In the horizon the Mexican border peeks above eye level. The desert becomes even more striking as the sun begins to set into that same horizon. I never took notice of colors in nature until it is just me and my environment. The wind rustled past my ears and it almost tickled my soul awake. It was cool for a summer day in south Texas, but the locals say that if you catch the desert at the right time of day it will be the most pleasant weather you ever experience. In that moment I believed them. Then a shiver ran down my spine as the darkness began to encroach upon time. Light pollution was not as prevalent in the butt crack of no where and the only thing that illuminates the sky at night is the moon and stars. As a girl who only knew city or suburbia this was uncharted territory. Scary territory. These illuminators scared me, but also left a new found piece to my identity. It gave me a beyond. I looked into the endless horizon then up at the never ending sky and I felt small in the most comforting way. The essence of loneliness dissipates in Marfa and the universe sang out. The distance between me and what lies in the unknown was vast, yet right in front of my eyes. Then come the lights. No one knows what these lights are, but they have been recorded in history for 100's of years. These Marfa lights. I saw them flicker and twinkle. Everyone who witnesses these lights have an explanation behind them, but what I find more powerful than the explanation is the fact that we all experience the lights. We all experience the horizon and the desert, and the wind rustling through our ears, and the nature, and sometimes shared experiences are more powerful than the why behind things.

(by Jayme Carrico)

Desire Lines writing prompt #2:

1. Clean entire room because you have been meaning to anyway and because you can't focus when it's messy.
2. Make sure laptop is plugged in
3. Take a nap
4. Crochet for a little bit (a green scarf for a friend. I meant to have it done before Christmas)
5. Look up pictures of the Denton square
6. Set phone timer
7. Go

Start at go (on the corner of hickory and elm). Roll the dice, cross the street. You have died of dysentery.

Just kidding. Two, walk two spaces. I can't remember what building is there, offices maybe. But on the other side of that is a bar. I haven't been it. Keep going. The courthouse is on your left. Skip turn.

Protesters block your path. You are right in front of Beth Marie's Ice Cream. I spent a lot of time here as a kid. There used to be only this one. Then they build the other one across town by where I live. I visit that one more now. But I attended plenty of birthday parties at this one. I used to love it. Both my mom and dad would take me there to celebrate or just for fun. One time I made an A on a math quiz or something that I had studied really hard for. My told me she would take me to get ice cream if I did well on the quiz. She always used to do stuff like that for me. She did it because she wanted to motivate me, not because she really cared too much about it. Anyway I dressed up my doll and we went and got ice cream. I always used to get vanilla. One time mom asked me if I wanted to try another flavor. I said yes. So she went down the entire display case of ice cream and read me every flavor. At the end she asked me which one I wanted to try. I thought about it for a second and said, vanilla. She just about killed me. Keep going. You are now in front of a records store. It was a clothing store or something before I think. I've only been in

there once. They sell cool buttons. I still have them. You are not in front of the new tourist location. I've only been in there once as well. They sell over priced tshirts that say Denton on them. The locals don't wear them. I know where I live. Part of the tourist location used to be a really cool antique shop. My mom used to love it. We never bought anything because it was really expensive. Maybe part of the reason it went out. Anyway one year for Christmas mom got me a little ceramic knick knack of two little mice asleep in a walnut shell. I still have it. If you keep going you are in front of LSA. That is new too. I can't remember what was there before either. They have really good burgers. I usually get the mushroom burger, but I recently tried the Turkey burger and it was really good (I don't really care for the garlic fries, don't tell anyone). Next to that is the Chestnut tree. I used to go there all the time as a kid too. It used to be really fun. My friends would have birthday parties there too. You would get to have a real tea party just like a fancy grown up. They still bring you muffins. I loved the muffins and the honey butter. So good. They changed the décor a few years back. I don't like it as much. It's really dark in there now. It's also more modern, and a lot less whimsical. Comic book store. Only been in once. Atomic candy, good taffy. Abby Inn, haven't been there in a while. Cross the street to the court house lawn. Memories of all the summers as a child where they would have concerts on the square. And all the winters where they would have the Christmas tree lighting. We haven't gone to that in several years. It gets too crowded. Don't forget to see the grave of John B. Denton. We think. We're not actually sure. They found some old bones that might be his and put them there. Cross the street back on locust. Skip turn, a fire burned down three buildings. On the corner is Recycled. Spent a lot of time there as a kid too. Mostly in the children's section. Mom always let me pick out a book. Lots of little nooks to play in. It was great for hide n seek as a kid. Go on to Oak. Barley and Board is new. I don't care for beer, but they have great mimosas. I know a few people who work there. I don't like all the people I know who work there. Elm street. My mom's office is on this street farther down. Palm Tree! Love this store so much. It's also new, but I'm so glad it's there. Got my mom her Christmas present this year from there. The owner is really nice. That's it! You won.

(by Liz King)

- Turned off the lamp
- Admired the purple lights of the tree
- Got headphones out of purse and put on a playlist I called post. I am so bad at naming playlists.
- Rolled my neck from side to side
- Bent over to stretch my legs and stayed there too long
- Twisted my arms in front of me
- Thought of dead aunt
- Sat on the couch with my writing sidekick, furry white pillow
- Read the prompt again
- Got in time machine and traveled to my first home

Walk up three sickly wooden steps onto the porch and pay no attention to, or admire the large plastic snowman in the summertime. Perhaps you also stop to admire the fact that a trailer this small even has a porch. Open the skinny door with a pop and now please take off your shoes to really get the full experience of what it is like to walk on deep green carpet. There is very cheap wood paneling along the walls that makes this place either excessively depressing or a great set for a TV drama. I think there is a TV, I know there is a TV at some point because I once watched *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* on it much too close. Where should we go. Turn right and the very nice thing about this space is it only takes a couple of steps to get anywhere. This is the kitchen and that big vent on the floor blowing air so cold you think the snowman would be happier in here, is where most of the rodents get in through. I can show you a trash can outside that usually has a possum in it. My dad feeds it and I think it should sleep with me. I think there is soup colored wallpaper. The laminate on the floor is peeling and you have to be careful not to get it stuck in your foot. Some rooms are not so good to have your shoes off. Now take the next couple of steps and here it is! The best room of all rooms- my room! Well mine and my sisters room. There is nothing on the walls but there are toys on the ground and thats what matters. But to get the full experience you really need to come back at night. There is no light here except a pink neon strip my dad hung on the wall. My sister and I love how it glows while we talk on the mattress we share on the floor. Until the tree roaches come. They love the neon glow and they are huge, looking back with my child eyes I see them as big as bats. And we have a bat in the room that we use just for the roaches, to swat them away. It is horrible and exciting and you simply have to squeal. Time is running out so lets go, wait let me show you the window. It is the only window in our bedroom and it looks out onto the forest. It is a perfect window but I often have nightmares about it. Dozens and dozens of dead people standing in the yard. They just look at my and I stare back. Ok lets go to the living room. I know the torn stuffed animals on the floor look menacing but if you use your imagination they are in a very well established medical facility run by the Muppets and myself. Now lets move on to my parents room. Axtually, I am sorry and this is embarrassing for a tour guide but I can't really remember it. I wasn't allowed in it much I guess. I know though, if you can just use your imagination to quietly peer in, there is jewelry in there and a barbie doll and my father's harsh police belt. Quick, lets go outside. We have to run because I only have a couple of minutes left and the forest is the best part! This place is alive and full of mystery. We can't go in without an adult because of the big cats. But there is a house buried out here and you have to see it. Someones house. Run faster, it is the greatest place I could take you.

Desire Lines Writing Prompt #3

Hypothesis: Indulge your nostalgia for another place by seeking it out in your current space. You will be walking for this prompt. Be prepared to walk.

Apparatus: A sense of nostalgia; map or guidebook may be useful.

This can be done in groups.

1. Decide where you want to be and what you'd like to be doing, then go there and do that.
 - a. For example, if you are home, you might want to go to a friends' house, the mall, or the park.
2. Map your way of going and document by writing the directions. Its important that you walk there as you need to mark the steps you take and turns you make to go there. It may not be feasible to walk to where you want to go from your home – if this is the case, you might drive somewhere that has multiple things you'd like to do within walking distance.
3. Apply a foreign map or guidebook to your space.

Take a map of somewhere else (i.e. print directions to another place you'd want to go but is not in your walking space). Apply the steps from your "foreign place" to your current situation. See where those steps take you, and document your process. These directions are malleable – if you're currently "home" for the holidays, why not take the opportunity to flip things up by applying some directions in Denton to where you are right now?

A short example, from Dr. Andrea Baldwin (UHCL):

"I live in Montrose, so I walked to the Menil museum. I marked my steps and turns as I went. HOWEVER before I left I printed directions from my sisters house in Dallas, to the dog park she frequents (i.e. foreign spot that I would normaly walk to) Once I got to the Menil, I took out the foreign map and applied it to my steps, I took the same turns and steps I'd take to get from that point A to point B. Because of that, I ended up in the center of University of St. Thomas."

****Nostalgia is a kind of 'homesickness' – often it takes the form of a desire for an idealized, misremembered past experience. When people move away from places they've lived a long time, they often seek out bits of things that remind them of 'home' in their new spaces. They try to relive those magical moments. In this project, find the nostalgia of living where you are.**

Write a document in which you reflect on your experiences, I want to know where you walked to, how you got there, and where you ended up. Describe things in great detail, as if someone else could follow these directions someday. Then, write about the foreign place, describe it, and about what it was like to walk in a foreign map space. Write where you ended up, both physically and mentally.

(by Cotton Hensley)

My mapping experience was a bit difficult because I opened up Google Maps to figure out the directions by blocks. The funniest thing is: I had forgotten the troubles of growing up in a rural town. On Google Maps, there were no blocks. Just landmarks and pasture with occasional pins for existing businesses. Unfortunately, I learned that the place I wanted to walk no longer exists. So, here's a quick run-down of where I went, how I mapped it out, and what I experienced on the way.

I used to walk to Buddy's Gas and Bicycle Repair. Everyday. There wasn't really anything to do where I grew-up, so walking to a gas station with my friend Robert was the most efficient way to use my time (when I wasn't golfing). I recently visited my house and paced out how far it took to get to the stop sign at the end of my street. I remembered the paces to the gas station from the stop sign because Robert and I paced it off as children. I sort of just went from memory, although I probably messed up the pacing slightly. So, my system was mostly just paces and a feeling for the building around me. In Denton, I started at Dix Coney Island because it was facing the east like my home, and Dix just seemed like the right place.

On my way, I imagined the houses and people I grew up around. I talked most of this out with Jesse and Liz because I figured it would help hash out some of my memories. The destination was what I was mostly focused on, but I found my memories of the houses along the way were much more significant. For instance, walking along side "Mr. Benning's" house was in reality John(?) Denton's grave on the square. I don't know why, but that was super funny to me. Mr. Benning threatened that he would shoot me if he saw me in his pasture again. Of course, he said this to my dad because I was around 8 years old at the time. Seeing the grave made me laugh because I honestly hope he is dead.

My favorite part of this journey was walking past "New Boston Courthouse", which was the first courthouse in my little town. For some reason, it's still standing even though no one takes care of it. In reality, it was the Denton Trophy House, which is probably actually wider than the actual courthouse. When we got to "Buddy's Gas and Bicycle Repair", we found a carwash that, now that I think about it, resembled the actual building. I thought of a fundraiser where we used to wash cars for the high school band. I was always assigned to Buddy's because I lived so close to it. I briefly reflected on how strange both of the areas were and how they so closely resembled each other. Buddy's was in a pretty poor part of town, as was this carwash. They both seemed to have some character to them. I doubt many people ascribed any meaning to these places aside from the owners and people who worked there. I just remember Buddy's as a place that I escaped to for 30 minutes a day. I couldn't tap into that for this carwash because I didn't have the context of my small and boring town. To me, Denton is full of life and opportunity, so there's no need for escape from boredom. I couldn't ascribe the same meaning to the carwash. I could only compare their similarities.

I have yet to mention the people I saw along the way. I imagine where they were and what they were doing. If they were even alive. I find it interesting that even when I'm not directly

confronted with their houses, the spaces in their place can still in some way activate a memory of the people that inhabit them.

(by Shawn Baker)

Prompt 3

My foreign map is the alley path I spoke about in prompt 2, so I thought it appropriate to start in my neighborhood, at the park behind my house. Follow a child's desire lines from a child's playground. Then at my childhood home, now at my children's home. Poetic shit.

I wanted to ride a bike, which I technically own. It's been locked in the shed behind the rental duplex I lived in 8 years ago. My friend still lives in the other half of that duplex, and I still have the lock key. It's surely in need of a lot of work. I like that it's there. So, no bike.

With my journey, there's an immediate problem. There are no alleys in my neighborhood. It's part of why I like living here now. Alleys suck. So of course one of my loved spaces as a child involved them chiefly. But from this park, there's a main neighborhood drag to the east that comes to a small bridge over a creek. Maybe the creek can be my alley, so I can see the backs of houses as I did on the foreign path as a kid.

I queue up Space Jam, the first CD I bought myself while in that childhood home, and the only CD I remember even having in that era, though I'm sure there were more. Press Play, let's go.

I walk by a few houses while walking beside this creek, I think I'm actually on someone's property, or at least city property that the homeowners have to maintain. But it's well-worn, clearly kids have walked through here, which is appropriate. This setting feels right. Overgrowth lines the sides of the creek, about 15 feet below me on the left. Then another problem, I hit a dead end of immense foliage in front of me, and a pristine wire fence with the classic "private property, no trespassing" sign. I'd hop it but see it's the edge of someone's backyard, and this is Texas. I would also just drop into the creek, but there's water in it, which is unlike this creek because it's still Texas and we haven't had any rain. Shit. Time to double back.

When I hit the main drag again, I head north in real life, then my first right turn down a regular old street. This is now my foreign alley out of it being the only option. I'm passing a few houses my wife and I looked at when we were looking for a house in this neighborhood. This one on the left we couldn't get because we heard about it the day it went under contract with someone else, who didn't back out. My wife brings this house up twice a year. She's decided in 2018 that she needs to love our current house more, which means work for me. That's fine. I want her to love coming home.

I take a right at an immediate fork, lining up with my foreign map. And now I'm heading in what the foreign map says is north. It's a straight road, which further makes the foreign map happy. I'm just passing houses now, in my current neighborhood, and they're all vastly different in style, which is another thing I like about this neighborhood. Signs dot the edges of the streets, because it's primary season. I'm unsure if any democrats are even campaigning, which is shitty. If they are, theirs are the signs which only mention their name. Probably smart of them.

I pass another house to my right that was up for sale when we were looking. It wasn't a contender for us, and I feel nothing about it other than recognition. It's almost time to turn left, onto what would have been my friend's street on the foreign map. It's also a fork here in the present, so lucky me. But there's no houses on my right once I turn left, where my friend's

house would be. Only a large clearing edging a creek, the same creek. Across it is the back fences for a series of houses. I walk across the grass to the edge of the creek, gazing further down to where it turns right, out of sight. It's pretty, and inviting. The area the creek's carved out is wide, with a tall embrace of treeline and fences on its side. An open space, a channel, that I'm sure countless kids have gone down, maybe my children in the future. I will not today.

A large hawk is perched on a tree, looking around. I hope he finds what he's looking for. I'm not. I haven't kept up with that friend of mine, don't know what it is he's looking for and if he's found it, either. And I wish him the same success.

It's time to walk home, and I decide that maybe I should apply the map again to create a circle home, because this trip has been a fucking bust. So I head east, having turned west to reach this clearing and creek. I cross a bridge over that same creek, seeing wine and liquor bottles in a stack down below, water flowing over them. The child in me smiles. The adult knows he should be annoyed, but isn't, really. I hope whoever left them there traded them for something they were looking for.

Then I'm immediately upon a street. My street. Huh. It's now a straight shot home, and that's what I want to do, re-do be damned. I'm passing even more eclectic houses of all styles and sizes, all with their own histories of residents and in varying levels of upkeep. I'm being passed by cars, suddenly realizing my entire trip through my foreign map was completely alone. How appropriate. And I'm heading home.

That foreign map, my desire line carved out of adolescent want for freedom, kinship, and solitude, is dead. It existed when it needed to and is respected in its death. I'm an adult now, with a wife, a mortgage, children, and with things that need to get done. I don't need to live in the past to find an outlet for mindfulness or get a sense of unencumbered fun that many adults feel they've lost. I carve out fun plenty in my own way now. Reminiscing, I now realize, is something I indulge in the presence of others who need it. A gift for them. I do love my memories of the past, but I don't need to relive them anymore. Now, I want to work on the future. Maybe my name needs to be on a sign in a yard, too.

Desire Lines Writing Prompt #4:

Create an emotional map of your childhood home. Associate important objects with each room and the associated emotions of each.

(by Jesse Snider)

The computer in the closet:

My parent's bedroom had a series of four walk-in closets for some reason, each with their own folding wooden doors. The closets had walls between them except for small holes on the shelves above that the cats could use to elude capture when my parents wanted to sleep. Inside the left-most closet was where my dad would set up the computer his work let him take home every weekend. I was always so excited for my dad to come home from work and for us to play video games together. While I couldn't climb through hidden passageways like my cats, the computer in the closet was a formative opportunity to step into new worlds.

When my dad finally got an actual computer that we had all the time, we put it in the dining room area. I was poking around on it one day and found a folder in the DOS shell called DOOM. My mom came down not long after to find the computer screen covered in blood, and I wasn't allowed to play any violent video games for years. I imagine i was very hard to deal with because I wanted to play those games so much, and my dad did something to where I could play DOOM but none of the enemies were in the game world, basically making it a game in which you walk around mazes and collect keys to open doors. I'm not sure what he thought I would get out of that, but I was very happy to just wander aimlessly around those 3d spaces.

I dont think i could have articulated this as a kid, but effectively i never wanted to play the games because you shot monsters, it was because i was fascinated by other spaces computers could create. I remember another video game that came out later called Unreal which was one of the most beautiful things i'd ever seen - you start inside a crashed space ship that's cramped and spooky, but then you get outside and are presented with a giant canyon with a far off waterfall you can explore. I remember my 10 year old self telling my dad that "they ruin this beautiful world by making you kill in it"

Vines: I remember the back yard being bigger than it probably is. Along the back fence, there is a big clump of vines that climb up and over into the ditch out back. I used to crawl around in there like it was the woods. I used to have dreams that out over the fence and threw the vines there was a huge drop into impossibly large cement ramps leading down to ancient trains that moved very fast, but their sheer size made them look slow. The dream train tracks ran perpendicular to the actual ditch, and the trains would pass under the house, which in dream logic was suspended above it in a garish steel structure. The dreams weren't scary, but when they started happening i didn't go in the vines anymore. This song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjnAE5go9dI> reminds me very a lot of the feelings that dream gave me.

(by Shawn Baker)

Prompt 4

A nip, or a pipe

My dad's office was to the right as you entered my childhood house. He didn't really work from home at this time, which is why there was no door into this space, although they could have chosen to install one because they had this house built. A hefty fucker of a desk sat in the back-center, topped with a glass pane over green felt. Under the glass, he would slide pictures of his family and useful reference cards for his job, on top of which was one of those classic golden-based lamps with a wide green glass shade, which I'd love to have taken from him. Who knows where it is now. My dad used to display a lot of trinkets on display shelves that lined all three walls of the space, which for him were work awards, half a dozen pipes he never smoked, and hundreds of nips, which are miniature liquor bottles. These things were unopened, from all over the world, kept behind glass cases. Hundreds of these little guys. Also in the space was his collection of vinyl, something else I wish I got from him, that have since been sold off. Later, CDs would invade, and I would spend a few hours a week pouring over my dad's music and listen. Never the vinyl, I was told not to fuck with the record player.

I've realized I inherited a lot from my dad's office, like my love of displaying my own objects in my own space. My interests are as obscure as nips, my work done with audio equipment, and unfortunately my door remains closed. Cats like to chew wires and piss, and my older daughter steals everything. But when they're older, I'd be glad to let them in. Also unlike my father, I drink the liquor in my office.

Divorce Papers

The dining room was to the left upon entering the house. Other than images in my mind of guests in there during dinner parties and several dozen images of me eating oven-baked Tony's pizzas, that is the space of Family Meetings, the big one being when my parents told me (9 or 10) and my younger sister they were getting divorced. I will forever remember the way my sister, age 7 or 8, sobbed. She didn't understand. Or maybe she did. I did, logistically. More layers of understanding would come with age. I'm sure I was sad at the time, but my memory of it now is dominated by a sense of displacement. It was this moment that shattered the entire space of that house, but I don't associate with it any sadness or regret or self-guilt or anger. It was just the place where everything changed, and that feeling of displacement would carry with me through moving to a Plano apartment with a single mother, and would dissipate in high school in Coppell. Displacement. Change. And a need to be stoic. For my mother and sister. I suppose I have this moment to thank for being prepared for and embracing my role with my wife and children as the tone setter of my now-family, but evolved to where that tone I try to set is happiness rather than Being Okay.

Home Alone on VHS

To the north of the dining room is a half-bath. One time, after watching Home Alone for the 600th time, I took a piss and was washing my hands and said "dammit!" like the mall santa did when his car wouldn't start, under moonlight, in a throwaway moment in the film. I did this with the water running, thinking in the back of my head that such a sound overwhelms anything else. But my mom heard and I got in big trouble. "My mother would have washed my mouth out with soap!" she said. Maybe she did that to me, too, but I don't remember it. I don't remember much

of anything, I consider it an immense mental problem that I hope isn't an alzheimer's indicator. But I do remember how fun it was to say "dammit". It still is.

Filet-o-fish Box

The kitchen was north of the half-bath, and it's where we ate breakfast, duh. I was a picky eater, but liked filet-o-fishes that my mom would eat. She started cutting them into quarters for me, desperate for me to get any protein at all, and I would dip my fries into the tartar sauce as I ate. I still eat filet-o-fishes, because I am a garbage human. One time, years later in college, McDonald's changed that sandwich, adding lettuce and a sesame seed bun. I discovered this, coincidentally, at the very same McDonald's my mother would get hers from when I was a child, because my girlfriend (and now wife) lived with her parents in the same town. I would order a filet-o-fish from this same McDonald's as a fresh adult, demanding it be made The Proper Way. McDonald's quickly changed the sandwich back to the way god intended. And I got my protein without much effort again.

Also there was a tornado at one point, and I saw our lawn furniture flying through the air. That was pretty cool. Before I had kids I would anger my wife with how lackadaisical I am about bad storms. But now I'm only that way if the radar tells me to be. When it's truly bad I'm a good dad who keeps everyone safe, I swear.

Star Wars on VHS

The living room was to the right of the kitchen, straight ahead when you walk in the house. My dad's pride and joy was a Zenith TV that is tiny and shit by today's standards, and had this remote control with brilliant green lights under a set of 4 arrows. I'd sit in my dad's lap as we

watched Star Trek and Seinfeld, staying up late some nights to catch Leno while my sister slept. My dad slept, too, until one of us would wake up and take me to bed. And as much as I would love to select a bit of Star Trek memorabilia for this room, I have to go with Star Wars. One summer day, while my sister was doing god knows what, my mom took me into the living room, holding a box. It was the new Star Wars trilogy VHS set, with Leonard Martin interviews with George Lucas starting each film in the trilogy. She skipped past that bullshit as she told me what I needed to know. "This is a very important series of movies. They may mean a lot to you." And off I went. It was exhilarating. Insert all the cliches about kids and Star Wars here. I outgrew it before the prequels, although I looked forward to that first one like one does seeing an old friend. I was immensely disappointed, but at least I was already out of that phase. If Disney never made a Star War again I'd be fine. But from 9 until middle school ended, Star Wars gave me the joy of wandering, exploring youth.

I was in a Star Wars fan film my best friend across the street made for school. He was a couple years older than me, but played with me all the time. As I've gotten older I recognize how nice of him that was. He introduced me to Monkey Island and other good ass DOS games of the era, which has ruined me. A very popular kid, he had a dozen friends involved in his little movie. All of them were older, vying for all the good roles. As a result, I was made the X-wing pilot who died in the action piece that started the film off. I hung out with the "crew" the rest of the day, helping carry set pieces and whatever the hell else needed doing. As we wrapped filming in the neighborhood park, my friend suddenly turned to me and handed me a space gun. It was revealed to everyone that my character survived, having crashed on this planet that looked like our park, and is the one who saves the lead character's life, played by my friend. Like I said, he was a very nice guy. He taught me a lot. And that's why I have to pick a Star Wars VHS tape. It's also why I've come to preach setting an example, and paying attention to others'.

Star Trek owns by the way.

A suppository

I used to get strep throat and other diseases every fucking year. I would also refuse to take medicine. So a few times my mom had to give me a suppository, on my parent's bed in their room. I remember nothing else about this room, except one time I walked in on my mom putting on a bra. If you want any more information about my nude mother, you're in the great company of every male peer I had in grade school. My apparently hot mother would help me over the years to hone my ability to deflect the jabs of bullies. "Your mom's single, right? I love a petite woman." "Well you're in luck, she loves ugly dipshits. Want her number?" Thanks mom.

Plant, in vase

There are stairs to your front-left when you walk into the house. Take them up, go left all the way, and you've found the guest room. Everything was pastel and just awful, with two twin beds and a vase on a bedside table between them, with flower. I think I'm making this vase up, actually. I used this room to jump on the beds with my sister.

A CRT TV with Super Mario World's Special Zone displayed

Dead center upstairs was the large Game Room, which could also have been another large bedroom except my parents built the house and wanted my sister and I have to have fun somewhere where our noise was lessened. We did all the usual kid activities in here, including my dance rehearsals (I tapped dance and was very good). But most importantly, it's where I played my SNES that my parents got us for Christmas at Incredible Universe (now Fry's) while

we waited in this weird daycare area. When I got to the Special Zone in Super Mario World and finally beat Tubular, I'd been playing for hours and it was like midnight. I was exhausted and either forgot the game had a save feature or didn't trust it, so I left the system on all night. I remembered to turn off the TV, though, because I'm a good boy who knows what burn-in is.

Polly Pocket

My sister's room was first on the right upstairs, and I never went in there. That was her space. She liked Polly Pocket.

She's younger than me, and still dealing with the effects of my parents' divorce. She has Daddy Issues and deals with many of its cliches. She has a dog now, which has helped her more than anything in her life. Maybe I'll tell her that someday. She used to get really mad about family not talking about those things with eachother, and even madder when you did, spiraling into venting about everything from her past. She's doing a lot better now, with help from her dog and therapy. I'm probably who I am in part to balance out with her as kids, overcompensating. I had to set an example. No one told me to, but I did.

I love my sister. She likes to reminisce, and I do it with her, because that's what she needs. Her hobby is photography now, and she's very good. People tell her so and she gets embarrassed. I think she's slowly being coaxed into turning it into a profit-making endeavor, but she won't admit it until she does it. I hope she does. Maybe I should tell her that. She's the person I buy the best gifts for. I should tell her that too. My relationship with her involves a lot of me trying to gauge when it's the right time to tell her things. Usually it's not, and I'm not usually wrong. I also hope

I'm more wrong than I think, because that would mean she's doing well. I'll test the waters the next time I see her.

Dead Santa

My room was on the far right upstairs, with a wide brown rounded dresser, my bed I hated making, and other shit I don't remember. The one and only time I got sent to Time Out was when I walked on my dad's car in the garage, not realizing he would see the footprints later. I got a stern Talking To on the floor beside my bed. As it ended, my dad let the cat out of the bag that he wasn't actually angry at all, it was just an act that parents have to do. It wasn't an explicit reveal, and I felt smart realizing it. I don't know if I prefer if my dad had meant for me to understand that or not. "Parents used to spank kids," he said at one point. I'm glad he didn't spank me, obviously. I was a much calmer kid than mine are. I don't spank them, either.

I realized Santa wasn't real in my bedroom one afternoon. I don't know what prompted this moment of clarity, but I was pacing back and forth next to my dresser at the foot of my bed, and if I wasn't issuing a monologue out loud, I might as well have been. I decided I would be a kid who knew the truth, but wouldn't indulge the fantasy in the kids who still needed to believe. And I would discuss the real truth with those who didn't, those members of a club of mature youth. I felt like I could read other kids well for what they needed. It's a form of empathy I feel I still have today. I hope I'm not wrong.

Actually, I do remember what caused this. My grandparents were in town and I helped my grandmother get groceries, in my parents' car. We popped the trunk, and under the moonlight I

saw many gifts. Something in me new these were meant to be from Santa. And so he died. I don't miss him.

Piss

We had a swimming pool in the backyard, complete with hot tub. Fenced off from that was a swingset/fort combination that got a lot of use by me, my sister, and neighborhood friends. One of my last acts when living in that house was to have a swing's chain break as I was on it, sending me flying back into the fence. That was pretty awesome.

We had a dog at one point that turned out to be too active to live with us anymore, one of those dogs that craves the outside. A true farm dog. We couldn't just leave her in this tiny area where she couldn't run and we couldn't see her, so we gave her away. A little while later, outside Best Buy was one of those shelter pop-ups, and sure enough that dog was in a kennel there, waiting for a new home. I was happy to see her, but she was looking depressed. I said her name. "Roxie!" Then she was happy, and I was depressed. I hope she found a good home. My dad never talked to me about how they had told us they found her a new home, when they obviously didn't. He had gotten caught. I was old enough to understand. I don't know if he knew that or had wished it. I think my dad lucked out with my mental state much more than my sister's. I hope I don't make the same mistake with my children.

My aforementioned friend was a big influence, and not always positive. One time we were on the swingset and needed to piss, and he started peeing in our bushes. I joined him. This would have been the second and last time I've gone to Time Out, because my dad saw us, but I think

he didn't want to go through that whole facade of pretending to be mad again. I'd still piss outside today if I didn't have a chain-link fence. I'm sorry about that fact. I'm also not.

Existential Crisis, or A Comfortable Sense Of Cosmic Insignificance

The two-story entryway to the house had a bigass chandelier. Our cat didn't like me, and I can't blame it, and she'd hide on a mantle halfway up the stairs. One time she refused to get down, which my mother desperately wanted her to do because there were expensive decorative vases up there. So the cat ended up jumping off and falling a full story to the ground, freezing in place for a full second, then bolting out of sight. This event was amazing to me, and I told it for years. It's not amazing. But that cat was. She got lost outside one time for weeks, found half a mile away in someone's two-story gutter. Somehow we got her home. Years later I would understand she didn't get lost, she just fucking left because that's what she wanted. I had been an asshole to her while I was very young, though I didn't realize I was at the time. I'm sure that fact was only part of her desire to escape, but for me it was all of it. When we moved out of that house, we tried to take her with us. I still have a long scar on my forearm from where she scratched the hell out me as I tried to get her into the car. I love that scar. It's fading slowly. She didn't die from old age in our care, I'm pretty sure she just left one day and never came back. I should ask my mother what happened, but I like how vaguely I remember it. Godspeed, Zuzu.

My kids are much better with our cats than I was as a small child. I don't know why. But I'm very happy about it.

But this entryway was the space of a moment in my life I cherish most fondly in that house. It's where I came to terms with my insatiable curiosity. I was pacing around in the space, turning over in my head the idea of Nothing. I knew broadly about humanity and Earth's place in Space, a minimal understanding of the grand cosmic scope of the universe. I'd also heard about the Big Bang, and stood staring out the front window as I tried to imagine the Nothing that existed before Everything. I had my first existential crisis, although I think this might be the wrong term. I wasn't thinking about Why Does Anything Matter? I wasn't thinking philosophically about it at all, it was simply an incomprehensible idea, completely fracturing my brain for one tiny moment. The moment itself I can't find the words to describe, but what immediately followed it, though just as fleeting, was a recognition of my complete and utter cosmic insignificance. And I found it comforting. But that comfort didn't take me off the hook for the responsibilities of my life. It also didn't make me want to work that much harder. It just made me more curious and hungry to learn, about everything. And I continue to have that drive.

Unfortunately my memory is shit.

(by Annaliese Ludecke)

The whole space was humid. I feel like that is important to say. It reminds me of how sometimes it felt like drowning in my own home. When you first walk in there is a long hallway. As a kid it seemed endless, and I always imagined that I was going on an adventure through this absurdly long tunnel to reach my food source, aka the kitchen. After school I was sufficiently hungry for a snack, and would promptly exit the tunnel into the holy land filled with milk, honey, and lucky charms. The lucky charms always sat to the left of Frosted Flakes. I then would forget to shut the pantry door on my way to get the milk which my mom would get on my case about later. It was a good day when I opened the fridge to see an actual gallon of milk instead of the dreaded beige pitcher. The pitcher meant I was drinking watered down milk until my dad's next paycheck.

I would pass the sink filled with dirty dishes before entering into my grandfather's room. He never did anything, but rock in his chair, but he comforted me. I think he is where I learned to appreciate silence between two people. At this stage of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's he shook a lot and had trouble speaking, but boy could we watch some Gilligan's Island. I always was more fond of Mary Ann, but he was a ginger guy through and through. He never ceased to get that across by pointing at the screen and giving me a side glance which I would promptly give him a nod with a spoonful of cereal in my mouth. After he died I would inhabit his room. It never really felt like mine though. I was sleeping a space that always belonged to him.

After I finished my cereal I would move to the living room where my mom was folding laundry and watching TLC. Even though my dad wasn't home from work, she would sit on her side of the couch leaving his side vacant. It's weird how people occupy spaces even when they are gone. After getting bored of What Not to Wear I would head into my sister's side of the house. I would pass the dry erase wall in the kitchen to get there. Even though it was strictly forbidden to write on it without asking my mom I would draw little doodles in the corner of the wall because it needed a little touch of something aside from grocery lists and recipes.

I would pass the broken door to the "sister bathroom" and enter my little sister Minnie's room. Minnie was always in my mom's high heels wearing sparkly dress up clothes and playing teacher. She had the best imagination out of all the girls and I liked playing along. Minnie says now that I always would act like the little sister going along with whatever game she mapped out, but I liked seeing her flourish and own a space. My angstier older sister always had her door shut and Minnie and I would plan out our spy missions to infiltrate the room that was perpetually in a state of "DO NOT DISTURB". Sometimes Savanna would let us play along with her and other times she needed her space to draw or paint or talk to boys or whatever pre-teens did in the early 2000's. My favorite space was the backyard though. We had a large deck that overlooked the back yard and I could do whatever and be whatever I pleased there. Most of the time I would sit on the swing and imagine what kind of life I would have in the future. I never had a problem growing up on the porch with the gray boards. I miss that feeling of wanting to grow up.

(by Austin Swarts)

Austin
Emotional Map

Houston, TX, the 90's (temperature and decade). I live here until I am 12, then I move to Hillsboro, TX, to live with my maternal grandparents.

ENTRYWAY – potted plants

Front door opens right to the stairs. You can head up there, to the kids' rooms, or to your left is the front den, affectionately called "the Play Room". There is a hallway next to the stairs, with a bathroom, and access to the living room.

PLAY ROOM – television remote

A large window fills the front wall, but Mom never opens the curtains—they let in a kind of diffused light. This is the room my sister and I hang out in. There is a futon, a bean bag chair, a television. My sister and I watch a lot of television. I play more videogames than her. There is also a card table with a computer on it. My dad and I play games on it. I also enjoy the Kid Pix program—it's like art software.

KITCHEN – dish towel

The front den, Play Room, leads into the kitchen. I like to dry the dishes. We would only eat as a family on Sunday evenings. Like, sit-down-at-the-table-together-eat. And so, we'd usually clean up together. Mom or Dad would wash, I would dry and put up, and Amanda would pretend her stomach hurt and excuse herself to the bathroom for the duration of the chore. I still love doing dishes.

LIVING ROOM – television remote

Just another room where we watched a lot of television. My dad would come home from work and just plant himself in the recliner. Now that I'm older, I like to pretend that he wasn't just zoning out, that he was actually a practiced yogi, and was entering trance states. But, I think he was just another disillusioned, bored, lukewarm man. He is a wonderful father, a provider. I'm glad he's not a "dad". He doesn't talk to me; he doesn't teach me things... I respect it, even in my childhood. I love that I'm given the psychological space to develop my own masculinity. When he moves out, I start sleeping on the living room couch, instead of upstairs. Amanda starts sleeping downstairs in the Play Room on the futon. I think we wanted to all be on the ground level--me, my sister, and my Mom.

MASTER BEDROOM – Snoopy stuffed animal

I like to hang out in here with my Mom. There are lots of books. I like flipping through her Reader's Digest magazines. She loves Snoopy. She has a Snoopy stuffed animal from when she was a little girl. He is well loved. My mother is strong and abundantly compassionate. She is an operating room nurse. And it being Houston, she sees some crazy shit. At night, she puts on a thin nightie and rubs lotion on her limbs. I catch glimpses of her breasts as she does this. Her body was my first physical space...far out!

MY ROOM – blocks

This is the best place, aside from outside. I spend the weekends holed up in my room, playing with blocks, and little Star Wars figures. I construct whole epics, and battles, and adventures. Toys are awesome. I also draw a lot.

AMANDA'S ROOM – stuffed animals

My little sister's room is pink. A soft pink. She has a lot of stuffed animals. I like the way they look all piled together.

SPARE UPSTAIRS BEDROOM – kitty litter

Unused room, just full of miscellaneous furniture. The cat box is in here. Such a particular smell. There is a painting on the wall of a black cat. It looks like our old cat, Tabitha. One night I go in and stare at the picture very intently, and contemplate death.

BACKYARD – stepping stone

My mom put stepping stones so she could move amongst all her plants. I spend hours just walking the path of stones, back and forth, again, and again, and again. My body is doing that, but my mind is off in my imagination.

(by Jayme Carrico)

Emotional Map

Laundry Room (dog crates):

Walk in through the garage into the laundry room. On your left is the hooks (a rack of hooks where we hang coats, keys, purses, umbrellas, etc.). On your right is the washing machine, then the dryer, then the dog crates (two stacked on top each other) and then a pantry cabinet. The dog crates are for medium sized dogs, but we put two small dogs in each one.

Kitchen (fridge):

The kitchen is one of my favorite rooms. It has always seemed really warm and inviting. I have a lot of happy memories of cooking with my mom. The fridge itself isn't actually the thing. It's the stuff on the fridge, specifically the magnets. We still have several magnets from my childhood. A giraffe standing upright (his tail looks like a penis. I realized that later in my life). A paper doll magnet with a magnetic wardrobe. A blue stuffed bear magnet. As few I made by gluing colored paper to glass pebbles.

Dining Room (portrait of my great great great grandmother):

My parents jokingly refer to this room as the "dead people" room. We have all the nice family heirlooms we have inherited in this room. But it never really felt like a shrine or mausoleum to me because we use these things. We decorate the antique dining table with my great-grandmother's table cloths, mom's wedding china, and my grandma's sterling silver. We do this for family birthdays and holidays. My mom is very adamant about using these things. This portrait is very old. It hung in my dad's childhood home. He and his siblings called her the mean lady and were afraid of her. I was never afraid of her though. She just looks serious, not mean. Sometimes I stand in front of my ancestor and wonder what kind of person she was. What was

her life like? What were her happiest moments? What was the saddest thing that ever happened to her? What would she think of me if she met me?

Living Room (couch):

A majority of the living room is overrun by a huge leather couch. Seriously, its huge. If you are under 6' tall you have to put several pillows behind your back so your feet can touch the floor.

Playroom (animal heads):

Up the stairs is a kind of second living room. It has mounted animal heads all over the wall. My dad likes to hunt, he has ever since I can remember. There are deer heads and ducks. For his 50th birthday my dad went a fancy hunt and brought home a gazelle-type mount and goat-thing mount. The worst one is a javelina. It sits right above one arm of the couch. Its snarling with its teeth bared. I used to forget it was there and it would seriously freak me out.

My Room (curio cabinet):

Just down the hall is my bedroom. It is decorated in teal and brown. I have enjoyed many naps in this room. My favorite thing in my room is a curio cabinet. I like tiny things too. I always have. When I was a kid, I used to pick a tiny thing and carry it around all day. I never lost the things. My curio cabinet is filled with tiny things. All of them have a story to them. My primary love language is gifts, so I always cherish the things I get as gifts.

(by Stephen Maxon)

The screen door is opened. You step in, and are in the **entry hallway**. To the right, there is a pot of extremely fake plants, the kind of plants you don't even call to hang out when all your other friends are out of town for Christmas. This plant is shady, and that is not due to its large, waxy leaves. However, it is comforting, as I believe it was my grandmother's old fake plant. WE are done here. To our left is the **dining room/piano room**. Little dining has been done here in recent years, but the piano was the source of a great deal of disgruntlement in my youth, where I had to practice all my songs four times in a row every day. These ignominious drills were something I ended up ultimately grateful for, as my backing in music theory learned there has carried me to this day in present musical endeavors. Once upon a time, we could proceed through the doors next to the piano to enter the kitchen, but then we had a dog who just adored shitting where she shouldn't, so we keep that door closed now, even though the dog is significantly more relaxed nowadays. Let's proceed back through the dining room, to the entry hall, and look at the **living room**.

This is a fine room, filled with Christmas, adolescent arguments, and a motley crew of old movies deemed necessary for viewing by my parents. Most importantly, it is filled with enough litter and bits of stuff that aren't mine and thus can't be cleaned by me since my folks claim to know exactly where everything goes. It has given me anxiety for probably 18 solid years just being in there and not being able to sit down in the big chair unless guests were in town and it was clean. Let's move on, I'm feeling a little jittery. Directly across the way from the

entry hall, on the other side of the living room, is the **outside room**, or what is more commonly referred to as a sun room. For much of my youth, there was a big plastic castle made by Fisher-Price in which my sister and I used, to play, hang out, beat the hell out of each other, etc. I remember one evening, I was maybe 7, where the sunset seemed to last two hours, when I read a Nate the Great book, one with a purple cover, perhaps "Nate The Great and the Sticky Case." This moment sticks out as one of exceeding calmness, peace, and contentedness. It has rarely been replicated since. In my adolescence, a workout machine took its place after we donated the castle. It was a place of peace for me, to an extent, at that age.

Moving on, we step out of the outside room where we entered and turn right to enter **the kitchen**. We rarely had family dinners here and the tiles are so ancient that they never appear clear. We primarily use the kitchen table to store things on. It is upsetting. Proceed straight past that table, its on your right, to the utility room. It is super unimportant, as is the bathroom on the left that you pass through to reach the guest room. This room has had everything moved out of it for awhile, to make space for my dead grandma's things. Once upon a time, its where my mom did work, and where I used a Macintosh Classic II computer running Netscape on dial-up to look up super neat pictures of then-new Star Wars Episode I actions figures. The pictures are still super neat, but that's not what I usually use computers for nowadays. Unfortunately, as we stand there, a pit opens up underneath us, and we are swooshed through a series of tubes to arrive at the entry way again. Weird.

From here, turn right and take two steps and turn right again. Here we're in the office! This was home to numerous computers I used unhealthily in my youth, for such purposes as a

very poor sex education to friendships with strangers across the country, to an unhealthy amount of time spent on Facebook. Ech, no need to linger. Exit, turn right, keep going until we reach **my room**. There are many items in here! It's difficult to think of just one important one, but I think perhaps the lumpy pillow will best exemplify the difficult times I had sleeping, whether due to fucking around on my phone or just sitting around unable to sleep.

Back into the hallway, we walk past **my sister's room**, a room best characterized by the computer she was on constantly, and used as an excuse when she didn't to hang out with me (which was 98 times out of 100, and hurt just a whole lot then). At the other end of the hall, there **is my parent's room**, where the item is a lamp on the right-hand dresser, which remained on even with the overhead light on when my sister and I would sit there with my dad and he would read the daily comics to us before we went to bed. These moments were close to the Nate the Great moment in terms of peacefulness.

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